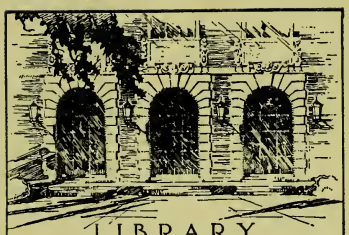

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VESTIGIA

VESTIGIA

BY

GEORGE FLEMING

AUTHOR OF
'A NILE NOVEL,' 'MIRAGE,' 'THE HEAD OF MEDUSA,' ETC.

VOL. II.

'Vestigia nulla retrorsum'

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VESTIGIA.

CHAPTER I.

INCIDENTAL.

THERE was a letter waiting at home for Dino. 'It stands there on the dresser; give it to your brother, child. One of Lucia's little nephews brought it, maybe half an hour after you were gone,' Sora Catarina said.

'It was Beppi brought it, Dino. He came with it on his way to school. He likes going to school; I asked him, and he said, "Yes." Mother, why don't I go to school? I wish I went to school,' said Palmira, in a complaining tone.

'School indeed! and a nice place you would find it, *bambina mia.* Nay, you be content to stay where you are looked after and get plenty to eat. Gesu Maria! 'tis all very well for such as Lucia's *nipotini*, poor children — 'twill maybe take their minds off their hunger, learning to read. But learning's a poor sauce to empty plates in my opinion."

'Doesn't Beppi have anything to eat but empty plates?' asked Palmira, opening wide her eyes. She added, after a moment's reflection, 'But you gave him some white bread to-day, mother. I saw you do it.'

'Nay, eat your dinner, child, and talk afterwards. Don't you see your brother is reading?' said Sora Catarina, in a lowered tone, passing her two hands over

the little girl's hair under pretence of adjusting her pinafore.

The letter was from Valdez. All the time he had spent in walking home Dino had been thinking of Valdez, planning about him, rehearsing in his own mind the words of some wild appeal which was to free him once for all from the intolerable burden laid upon his life. Last night seemed so far away. He had passed through a whole world of emotion since then. He had put Italia between himself and his promises to those men; he had made himself responsible for her happiness, and it was impossible, even Valdez with all his fanaticism must see that—it was impossible *she* should be made to suffer for him. Out-of-doors there, looking at Maso's good-natured simple face, with old Drea's

cheery voice in his ears, it had somehow seemed such an easy natural thing that matters should arrange themselves. But this note was like a death-warrant. Before he opened it he knew there was no hope: the shadow had closed around him.

There were but three lines:

'I have reason to fear we are watched. Do not try to see, or communicate with, me until you hear again. Be prudent and patient: you will hear in good time. The child who brings this lives in my house, and is a safe messenger.'

There was no signature.

Dino crushed the note up in his hand with an impulse of personal enmity. He turned away from the window and took his seat at the table without a word, but no effort of self-control could keep his lips

from turning white, or alter the fixed look of pain about his eyes.

'The letter was from Pietro Valdez, surely? Was it bad news, *figliuolo?* What has happened, in the name of all the blessed saints!' said Sora Catarina, clasping her hands and looking at him.

He made an effort to smile as he said, 'Nothing, mother; it's nothing. Valdez only writes to say I shall not see him; he will be busy for a day or two.'

'And is it not seeing that man could make your face go the colour of a piece of linen bleaching in the sun? Nay, *figliuolo mio*, I am not one of those people who think they are seeing through a wall when all the time they are looking at their own reflections in a looking-glass. 'Tis nothing an old man could write you would

turn your face that colour.' She lowered her voice. 'Tell me the truth, Dino. You have been having a quarrel with Italia?'

'No, indeed, mother,' said Dino, pushing away his plate and standing up. He could not swallow the food before him. He could see that his mother was not convinced by his denial, but it was easier to leave her under any delusion rather than to submit longer to the worry of a cross-examination. He took refuge in saying, 'I am not well; my head aches. I don't want any dinner. I shall go and lie down.'

'Yes, my Dino, yes. Lie down. *Santissima Vergine*, that it may not be the fever!' said Sora Catarina, crossing herself devoutly.

She kept going to the door of his room to look at him at intervals all the afternoon. About six o'clock Maso called with a long message from old Drea. The Marchese Gasparo had hired the boat for a three days' trip to Viareggio. If Dino was coming, he was to be ready immediately: the wind was fair, and Drea proposed to start before seven. 'He said I was to tell you the boat would be back on Saturday night, in time for Monte Nero,' Maso concluded, looking carefully into the crown of his hat and shaking it, as though to assure himself that he had forgotten there no part of his commission.

He waited for Dino at the door, and they walked down to the pier together. Gasparo was standing smoking a cigar at the head of the steps under a gas-lamp.

He nodded cheerfully to Dino. 'That's right, old fellow. Glad you are coming,' he said. The two men were with him whom Dino had seen at the door of the 'Giappone' that morning.

They seemed to have many friends at Viareggio. The *Bella Maria* was kept in constant readiness, for there was no telling at what hour a message might not come down from some neighbouring villa, to be followed shortly by a company of pleasure-seekers bound for a sail. On one occasion Dino saw a face he knew among the cloaked and furred figures whom Gasparo was handing so carefully on board.

There was an unsteady wind that afternoon, and the boat was heavily laden: it was some time before Dino could look

away from his task of watching the uncertain half-filled sails, but when at last the breeze struck them fully and the *Bella Maria* ran out of harbour on a long smooth tack, he could not resist his wish to see if he too had been recognised.

The Contessa must have been watching him, for the moment he turned his head their eyes met. He took off his woollen cap hastily, without speaking. She kept her dark eyes fixed steadily upon him for a moment.

'You have taken my advice then? This is wiser than building barricades,' she said in a low voice.

She looked as if she might have added something more, but at that moment Gasparo, who was sitting beside

her sheltering her from the sun by holding up her parasol,—Gasparo leaned forward and repeated some remark.

The Contessa laughed. 'You think so, *vraiement?* It is not my experience. I find it is not only the virtues which require a certain elbow-room in which comfortably to expand. Some people fight against their own selfishness in this world, but mostly they fight the selfishness of their neighbours.'

'And why not? After all, it's other people's selfishness that one objects to,' said Gasparo gaily.

'And that is only out of disinterestedness,' struck in another man, who had not yet spoken. 'You are too severe upon us, Contessa. One never tires of virtue.'

She lifted her delicate eyebrows inquiringly.

'Well—not of other people's virtue: one tires of one's own perhaps.'

'But it's so seldom one has the chance of *that*,' added Gasparo lightly, pulling with one hand at the fringe of the big parasol. He had distinctly heard what had been said to Dino; but now, as his eye rested upon him, he nodded in a half-careless, half-friendly manner. 'She's going better now. We shall get more wind beyond the breakwater, eh, lad?'

'Yes, sir,' said Dino, putting on his cap again and going forward to coil away a loose rope.

Everything he had noticed in the last day or two made him feel safer about Gasparo. The young Marchese was an

excellent sailor; he was absorbed in his present amusement; the two young men had not exchanged a word unconnected with the management of the boat.

Those three last days had seemed to Dino to pass like a dream. After his sedentary habits of life between the four walls of an office, the mere fact of being always out-of-doors and always actively employed would have sufficed to change all his impressions. He was intoxicated with fresh air, with sunlight, and the exhilarating sense of energetic work. 'There's no life like it, lad; no life like it,' old Drea told him more than once. 'Other men may make a better living, I'm not denying it; but to be content with what one gets in this world is to be the master of it. When you're as

old as I am you'll find that you can't put one foot in two shoes, boy; it's a good plan to know what you want and be contented with it when you've got it —a rare good plan.'

'If only wanting were enough to get it,' said Dino bitterly.

'Lad, lad! *Bisogna dar tempo al tempo*—give time time enough to work in. But you youngsters are all alike; you expect to smell fried fish before the nets are even cast into the water.'

'That 'ud be a poor look-out for supper,' observed silent Maso with a grin.

'What! were *you* listening to what I was saying? Then I'm bound you'll be whistling for a wind before long, my boy;—you know the old saying, when

you see a donkey listening it's a sign the weather is changing,' retorted old Drea, shifting his pipe in his mouth and giving vent to a dry chuckle.

But presently, as Maso moved away, Dino looking up found the old man's keenly-inquiring glance fixed full upon him.

'We've known each other a good many years, and each of us knows pretty well what timber the other's boat is built of. Without wasting breath, boy,—is there anything troubling you?'

Dino doubled up his fist and struck one of the rowlocks tighter into its place. 'Oh! every one is more or less troubled,' he said evasively.

'Ay; but there's a difference, there's a difference, boy. Little worries, Lord

bless you! they're everywhere. And they're like a grain o' sand in your eye, no use to any mortal man, out or in. But real trouble's a different thing. I'm not saying there's no use in it, or even that a man ought to hope to escape it; it's only a fool would expect the wind always to be blowing from the same point o' the compass. And a real sorrow —an old sorrow—I've known it to act like ballast. It's heavy; ay; but it trims the boat. There's many a man wouldn't sail so straight about his day's work if there wasn't some dead weight o' that sort at his heart to steady him.'

He was silent for a moment, and then once more he looked with a kindly affectionate glance at the young man's flushed and averted face. 'I'm not asking for

more than you want to tell, lad. When a real friend has got two eyes to look at you with, sometimes the best service he can do you is to keep one o' them shut. There's nothing easier than to sail when the right wind's blowing; you'll tell me all about it fast enough when the time comes. *Andiamo! corraggio, ragazzo!* It's a poor business looking at the sun with a cloudy face.'

He gave a searching look at the horizon, "We'll be in in half an hour more if the wind holds—we'll have her snug in harbour before sunset. And then, hey! for a clear sky to-morrow and a day at Monte Nero. To-morrow'll be the finest day we've had this week, and I'm glad o't, I'm glad o't. I don't like having my little girl disappointed.' He turned his

head towards the sunny semicircle of houses of the distant city, 'She'll be waiting there now to see us come in, *che Dio la benedica!*'

Dino, too, was secretly preoccupied with the prospect of that approaching meeting. He was the first to see her as they ran the long oars out to pull the boat in across the smooth water of the inner port. He saw her scarlet handkerchief, a spot of colour a long way off beneath the shadow of the bridge. She was standing in the same place as when he had last seen her, and it was like a good omen that he should have been the first to discover her at that distance.

She spoke first of all to her father, but as she put her little hand into his Dino was exquisitely conscious of the quick

tremor of joy which made her heart beat at his touch. There was irresistible delight in the mere fact of being near her. And there was no lack of brightness now in the face which turned towards her, or in the voice which wished her 'Good-night!'

'Until to-morrow, Dino,' she said, following him to the foot of the stone steps.

'*A domani, cara!*'

There was a bright fire and a welcome waiting for him in the old room at home. He stood before the blaze talking for several moments before he crossed the room to look at the shelf above the dresser where the letters were put.

'Are you expecting anything? There are no letters for you, my Dino; no, not even one little letter. Are you sorry?

Do you mind?' Palmira asked, rather anxiously.

He stooped to kiss her. 'No, little one. I was only looking. I don't really want it at all,' he said laughingly.

It seemed like another good omen that there should be no news from Valdez.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE WAY UP.

The small stone-paved piazza of Monte Nero was crowded with men, women, and children, gathered together for the yearly pilgrimage of the Madonna. On one side of the square a flight of stone steps led up to the door of the church: the heavy leather curtain was rolled up half its length and fastened back to be out of the way of the coming procession; and massive wreaths of flowers and fruit swung from cornice to cornice above the open door. It was too early in the year as yet for many bright-coloured flowers,

but the wreaths were white with the bloom of the first almond trees that had blossomed, and long rows of ripe oranges and lemons, threaded like beads upon a cord, were fastened in festoons about the old gray stones. The gold and softest pinky white looked very pretty hanging high up in the afternoon sunlight above the heads of the people.

It wanted a good hour and a half yet to the time appointed for the procession, and the café which stood on the opposite side of the square, and the open-air booths which clustered about its lower end, were alike full of eager, laughing, pushing, hungry holiday-making folk. The most correct place to be recognised in by one's friends was, doubtless, at one of those small green tables in the shade in front of the

caffettiere's; but for that matter there were people enough everywhere, people all over the place, not to mention the two constant streams, one ascending and one returning, up and down, the worn old steps of the church. These were composed for the most part of women, leading small dressed-up children by the hand. The men were content to wait outside until the church bell itself should put an indisputable end to the little friendly glasses of bitter vermouth and the gossip. They stood about in groups, a sunburned hardy lot of fishermen and sailors, for the Santissima Madonna of Monte Nero is known to be the especial friend and patron of seafaring men; the church is crowded with votive offerings, rude pictures of sinking barks and drowning men, and always, in the corner, the

glorified vision of the Virgin descending upon the waters to bless and save. The ceilings of some of the side chapels are completely hidden from view by rows of these representations.

Monte Nero itself can hardly be said to deserve its name of a mountain, being nothing in fact but a high grass-grown hill, rising behind the city of Leghorn and commanding a superb view of the sea. Near the top the country presents the appearance of a succession of grassy downs, across which a narrow path takes a short cut from the winding carriage road to the summit, and at this particular moment Lucia and Italia were walking hand in hand along this pathway, while Dino followed on the grass at Italia's side. The old people had remained in the *carretella* with Palmira.

'I don't think much of your plan of chartering a ship to get out before the voyage is half over, children. But do as you like, *ragazzi*, do as you like. What, you too, Lucia? Nay, I gave you credit for more sense than that, my woman. You'll not find Sora Catarina here getting out of a comfortable carriage to walk up a devil of a hill.'

'But Lucia is perfectly right. Some one must go with Italia. It would not look well if she were to be met walking alone with a young man,' interposed Sora Catarina very decidedly.

'E—e—h, *buon anima mia*, the scandal would be bigger than the sin.'

Catarina looked at him a little scornfully. 'You were different once; long ago. I wonder if there is *anything* that you would really trouble yourself about now, Andrea?'

'Well, there's my little girl. There isn't much else, I suppose,' said Drea good-naturedly. 'You know the saying we have, we sailors,—a wide shoe and a full belly, and take the storms as they come. That's my way of thinking.'

'Ah,' murmured Catarina, drawing her shawl more closely about her.

They had been young together, these two. Catarina could remember a time when to be alone with her, as now, would have been the measure of happiness to the hopeful, ardent young lover whom the slow years had changed into this weather-beaten old man. To a woman's eyes there is always an atmosphere of youth left about any man who has made love to her, no matter how the years have passed since then. And it made no difference to her

secret feeling of reproachfulness that she herself had perhaps much to answer for in this general lowering of Andrea's estimate of life. A woman betrays and remembers where a man betrays and forgets. And at that particular moment faithfulness seemed to Catarina to sum up all the virtues.

In autumn the morning freshness of the wood lingers late: there is something of the coolness of the dawn in the pine shadows long after the fruitful warmth has fallen upon the fields. And in some natures, growing old, there is left somewhat of this same touch of virginal freshness and charm. I think it is oftenest the case with women who have been unhappy in their youth—who have missed the placid midsummer fruition of content. They bear in their hearts an eternal unsatisfied belief in the spring.

She looked at Italia and Dino walking away across the sunny grass slopes: it seemed not so many years since she too had been walking there, going on the same errand to the same old church. She watched them with eyes grown bitter with a dreary sense of loss: it was like watching the mocking phantom of her own youth.

But to them the day seemed lengthening out into uncounted hours of pleasure. The sky was cloudless. The spring wind blowing over their faces held a magic of its own. 'Come and walk on the grass, Sora Lucia. Never mind the path—there is no place in the world like these downs. The air changes as it blows over the grass; it is like some one breathing; like a breath that comes and goes,' said Dino, taking off his hat and turning to face the wind.

'Look at the sea now. How far it is below us,' said Italia, stopping too and looking back.

'What a sea-bird it is,' he said, meeting her eyes with a smile of happy confidence. 'What would you do if you had to live inland, Italia?'

'Oh, I could not do it. I should stifle. I am always thirsty where I cannot hear the sound of the waves.'

'How can you possibly tell where you may have to live, *figlia mia?* It is true one does not go away from one's own town if one can help it, but a girl before she is married is like a bit of thistle-down, who can tell which way the wind will blow her?' asked Lucia in her subdued voice. She, too, was dressed for the festa, and her neat black gown contrasted with the

blue and scarlet of the girl's holiday dress, much in the same fashion as her thin face, with its unvarying look of decent disappointment, served as a background for the young radiance of the face by her side. 'How can you tell whom your father will wish you to marry? It might be some one who came from a long way off,—like Dino's friend, the Signor Valdez, who lodges in our house. He comes from a country where they do not speak Italian, for all he looks so like a Christian.'

'I have not seen old Valdez lately,' Dino began.

If he wished to ask any questions Lucia spared him the trouble.

'He is a kind man that,—the blessed saints reward him,' she said, with a sudden fervour. 'And to think how long it took

us to find it out,—and the world is hard enough, God knows, without one shutting one's mouth the days it rains comfits. But, *via!* we knew he was a stranger from over sea. What would you? when he said "*buon giorno*" or "*felicissima notte*" as one passed him on the stairs it was like a bear growling; it did not sound like real Italian. Many and many a day have I gone away to my work with the old *nonna* locked in our room, and my heart in my mouth, not knowing if it were better to leave her there, with all the children, and not a soul to go near them in case of fire. And me never so much as dreaming of asking Signor Pietro to stop sometimes when he passed the door to give them a look. Ah, he is a good heart, he is. And, as for his never speak-

ing, well, there's evil talking enough in the world, God knows! a man can do worse things with his tongue than keep it quiet. As for those children, they are fairly bewitched; there's that Beppi, he follows Signor Pietro about like his shadow. It's Signor Pietro who pays now for his schooling, and such a bright lad as it is! You should have seen him the other day when Signor Pietro told him first about his going off on a journey. Nothing would content the boy but bringing back his geography book from the school to show the *nonna* all the places.'

'Does—does Pietro talk of going away, then?' asked Dino, his heart beating faster.

'See that, now! and you such friends. But I always knew that Signor Pietro

could keep his own counsel. Perhaps it's a way they have over there in the countries he comes from. Yes, he is going away. To Pisa first, and then perhaps to Rome. He says he wants a holiday, and no wonder. *Cose lunghe diventan serpe*,—drag a thing out long enough and it becomes like a snake. And it's two years or more since he has had a day's outing from Leghorn.'

They had been sitting down to rest on the short dry turf as she talked, but now, as they rose to climb the last shoulder of the hill, her sharp black eyes were turned scrutinisingly upon Italia. She gave some slight ejaculation of surprise. '*Vergine Santissima!* Italia, you have lost your ring—your beautiful ring. What a misfortune! Madonna *mia*, what a misfortune!

Italia blushed scarlet. 'No, I have not lost it. I did not put it on,' she answered hurriedly. And then, after a moment's consideration, 'Old things are best,' she said in her sweet full voice; 'I did not want a new gift,—I told my father I did not want it. He will keep it for me, he will give it to me to wear when I am married.'

'And you will wear it that day, my Italia?' asked Dino, looking at her and speaking in a very low tone, yielding yet this once more to the perilous delight of saying what he would have said, what he would have had the right to say, if only he could have hoped to escape from all the consequences of his past actions. The instinctive conviction that this proposed journey of Valdez's was in some way con-

nected with the disposal of his own future gave Dino a still more intense longing to grasp at present happiness. He knew that he was acting ungenerously; yet, as the girl turned her face shyly towards him,—her red silk handkerchief tied about her head in peasant fashion made a soft shade about her temples and her little ears, coming down in front in a bright silken fold across her low forehead, hiding all her hair, and giving an almost Oriental look to the dark straight eyebrows and the dark lustrous eyes. The wind and the sun had brought a soft pink colour into her pale oval-shaped cheeks.

She was really looking very beautiful as she said, 'Why make plans for the future, my Dino? Surely we are very happy; we do not want things to change.

The old things *are* the best. Why, even this pilgrimage to-day,—one would always care to come, of course, just to show the Holy Mother that one is grateful,—but it would be so different, it would be so sad, if we were to forget the other years that went before. This is the happiest year of them all, I know, yet I should not like not to have the memory of the times we have been here as little children. I like the old gate there at the top because that is the spot where we have always waited; I could open it myself quite easily, but I like to remember the days when it seemed to me wonderful that you could unfasten the lock. It is like that picture of my father's shipwreck,—you know, Dino,—the *ex voto* up there in the chapel. When I was a child I believed

it had all happened exactly like that. Now I know it was painted by a man who has never even seen my father, but it makes no difference. I could never care for a fine new picture as I do for the old one.'

'*Anima mia!*' said Dino passionately, bending a little towards her, as she stood, leaning with folded hands against the old wooden gate. When she ceased speaking there was something almost childlike in the serene unconcern of her face. But there was nothing hard, nothing self-engrossed, in this *insouciance* of Italia's. It was merely the expression of a nature accustomed to a large and frank acceptance of daily life—a genuine indifference to petty devices. This fisherman's daughter, in her little cotton frock, had something in

her of the wide-eyed serenity of an elder world; she had inherited from her father something of his cordial simplicity—'a princely disregard of little things.'

It was only a minute or so before the *carretella* overtook them by the gate: they all entered the crowded piazza together.

The three women hurried away to look after the room which had been promised them for their night's lodging, but only a very few minutes were past before they too were back in the piazza, for now the bells, which had been silent all afternoon, were pealing together with a short and merry stroke. The procession was about to begin.

Inside the dusky church there was an unwonted shuffling of little feet; a wavering of lights clutched by uncertain little hands; an anxious movement to and fro of black-

robed *frati*, marshalling and adjusting the unruly lines of brown and flaxen heads. It was the children's part of the procession; and more than one woman in the crowd felt her heart swell and her eyes grow moist as she watched them, *poveri angeli!* A long broken line of small human creatures, in brightest holiday dress, and each with its burning taper, following the great golden Cross as it passed solemnly, borne on men's shoulders, out of the gloomy aisles, out under the wreaths of spring blossom, and down the steps into the warm afternoon light. That was perhaps the prettiest sight of all, as the twinkling tapers grew dim in the sunshine. And then came rows of young white-robed choristers, and the impassive faces of the officiating priests; the low sunlight burned like a jewel upon the

tinselled stoles, and the reds and purples of the vestments were vivid and deep like the colour of garden flowers. The blue cloud of incense rose straight up, with scarcely a waver above the bent heads of the kneeling crowd, as the Blessed Sacrament was slowly carried around the piazza. The afternoon was windless, and the people so hushed, that even from the farther side of the square the priests' solemn chanting was distinctly audible, and the warning tinkle of the bell.

The last to descend the steps were a white-robed company of Brethren of the Miserecordia, with masked faces and hands hidden away under the long folds of their garments. They passed like a little company of the sheeted and forgotten dead, between the gay ranks of the holiday-

makers ; and, as they emerged from the shadows, the bells rang joyously overhead, a peal which set them rocking from side to side, in a visible triumph, in the old open belfry.

This was a sign that the procession was ended. There was an instant rush for the now empty church ; there was just time to visit the holy pictures before supper, and if one had any especial prayer to offer, why, it was but natural to expect a little prompter attention from the saints, who might easily be supposed to be still looking down approvingly upon what was going on in their honour.

Drea and his party were among the first to re-enter the shadowy portal. There was scarcely light enough now in the side chapels to distinguish any unfamiliar ob-

ject, but the old fisherman walked straight to where his own *ex voto* offering had hung these many years.

'Ah! that *was* a night, if you like; that *was* a night to remember!'

'Were you frightened, father?' said Italia, speaking in a whisper, not to disturb the people kneeling all about them, and asking the same question she had asked in this same place, at every recurring festa of the Blessed Madonna, since the first time she had been brought there, a small wide-eyed creature clinging to her father's hand.

"Nay, child, nay. It 'ud be a poor business if one's courage did not hold fast in the right place. It 'ud be like fastening one's boat up with a rotten cable, there'd be no depending upon anything then. But it *was* a night, that. A man who doesn't

live at sea doesn't know the meaning of a prayer. Not that we had much time for speaking; but it seemed to come natural to think of the Holy Virgin then,—just as I thought of you, sleeping in your little bed.'

He looked at the picture again. 'Ay. We brought off the men and a fine bit of salvage; I mind me how pleased the old master was when I went up to the Villa to tell him about it. He was in his bed, I remember, and he wore a thing with a frill round his face, like a woman's night-cap. He was finely pleased. Everybody used to say he was going to leave me something in his will—something over and above my wages—as a sort of thank you. Your mother used to count upon it, poor soul! and so did I for a bit—I should have taken

it kindly of the old master, I should, if he had remembered it at the last. We knew each other many a year.'

Dino and Italia exchanged a meaning glance.

'And if it were to come now, father? that would be better still; you could get a new boat,' she said, with a smile of irrepressible pleasure.

'Nay, child, the will was proven long ago. If there was ever any money coming to me—and the old master used to say there was, he used to say so—it stuck in the lawyers' hands years ago, like a boat aground. It never made any difference in my way o' remembering the old master. It would be but a poor look-out if one could serve the same master faithfully for twenty years—and I so used to him, knowing just

what he meant when he swore the loudest —it 'ud be but a poor look-out if it only meant losing one's liking at the end of it. 'Tis a weak friendship that's so ready to call for the blessed sacraments at the first little knock on the head;—that's my way o' thinking.'

It was growing dusk, outside as well as in when they left the dim church, with its smell of fresh crushed bay-leaves underfoot mingling with the stale incense smoke, in a way which always carried Dino's memory back to very early days, when his father was still a trifle undecided about the exact relations of Church and State, and not unwilling to give his little boy the treat of staring at the lighted candles of the festa. The remembrance of his dead father's face rose vividly before him, and he lingered

for an instant behind the others at the door, looking back.

As he hurried on to rejoin Italia old Drea touched him on the shoulder. 'The women will go to bed early, but I want you to come out a bit with me after supper, lad. I want to have a talk with you,' he said.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE LIGHT OF A TORCH.

They came out of their lodging, an hour later, into the deserted square. Lights were flaring in nearly every window, and in every house was to be heard the rattling of bottles and plates, and men's voices calling for more wine. But it was quiet enough out here, under the stars, in the empty piazza, where the last booths were being closed for the night.

They strolled over to the lower part of the square, and sat down upon the parapet; Drea was lighting his pipe.

'Look here, lad,' he began abruptly

The match in his hand went out, he felt for another in all his pockets, swearing the while at the mischance.

'May the devil fly away with all fine clothes, say I. For why should a man change his coat any more than his skin? I've worn this jacket every festa for the last twelve years, and I never yet could learn the trick o' its inside.'

'I've got lights,' said Dino.

'Nay, lad, where there's a way out there's a way in. I'll not be beat by it, thanking you kindly.'

He puffed at his pipe thoughtfully before he spoke again.

'It's a good many years now since the first time I came up here. Lord, how the years go! I mind me—— Your mother was a young woman then, Dino; no older

than my little girl there, and I was a wild young fellow. Well, well; it seems more than one lifetime ago. I'm getting to be an old man now, my Dino. It gave me a start the other night to hear our young master speak of it, but it's true enough for all that.'

'Perhaps it is. But you never seem old to me, Sor Drea.'

'I've had my turn at it, lad; I can't complain. But maybe the Captain was right about my settling down; maybe he was right. I don't suppose I can be far off sixty. The old master lived to be seventy-two, he did; but then he lived like a wax image packed in cotton wool. And when a man's knocking about day and night, why, Death needs no lantern to find him.'

He took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at it.

'There isn't much to leave behind me, lad. Only the old boat, and Italia. She'll miss me, will my little girl. She's wonderful fond of her old father. But you'll look after her; you'll be good to her, Dino?'

There was no answer.

'You see, it isn't as if I were leaving her to strangers. But I've been fond o' you, boy, since you were that high; when you used to come to play with her in the old boat, and I used to sit and watch you and wish I had a little curly-headed chap like you, that 'ud grow up and help me about the nets. My girl's a good girl; but a boy 'ud have been different.'

He was silent for a moment; then he put his pipe back into his mouth and gave

a slight chuckle. 'There's no basket without its handle; that's sure enough. I've got 'em both now, girl and boy too. I was an old fool not to have thought of it sooner; but it's difficult to see that the children have grown up, when you remember them so high. Well, lad, I give you joy, I do. She's very fond o' you. There's only one thing I want to speak to you about. It's all plain sailing before you then.'

'And what is that?' asked Dino, very quietly.

His face was in shadow, but there was that in his voice which startled the old man with a foreboding of coming trouble. He leaned forward, peering anxiously into the darkness. 'Eh? what's that, lad, what's that you're saying?'

'You say there is one thing you wish

to speak to me about before—before I can be affianced to Italia. I ask you what it is.'

'Nay, my Dino, I said nought about being affianced, if that's what's troubling you. Not but what I could easily find another husband for her; there's Maso, now; as honest a lad as ever hauled at a rope, and a good bit o' money too, all in the bank. But what does that matter? I've never promised her to you; but it would be but a poor sort o' friendship that only depended upon words. I've done more than give you my promise, lad; I've trusted you, I have.'

'Good God!' said Dino, under his breath, looking up with blank eyes at the clear starlit sky above him.

'There's no need for many words to settle it.' He hesitated; and then went on with sudden fluency as if the long

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meditated speech were forcing its own way out. 'See here, lad. It's not so much more than a week since you lost your place because o' that infernal tomfoolery of a procession. I'm not casting it up at you, my boy; not I. But there 'tis; you made a mistake. It might have been a worse one, for you meant no harm, and as things go it's all turned out for the best. I wouldn't have cared to marry my little girl to a writing fellow, and you've got the make of a sailor in you, lad; I always said it. When God Almighty shuts one door in an honest man's face, if you look about you you'll see He's opened another. But it might ha' turned out different.'

He lowered his voice, and added: 'I don't blame you, but I've kept my ears open, and there are things said about you

that I don't like; I don't like. When a man lets his net down to the bottom he's sure to catch mud. I saw your father do it. *He* called himself a republican too. You must give it up, my Dino.'

'I can't do that,' said Dino, in a very low voice.

The words implied so much to himself that he could scarcely believe in the reality of things—he felt involved in the fantastic irony of a dream—when Drea burst out laughing, good-naturedly.

'Why, lad, you don't understand me? Where are your wits? I am speaking Italian, *mi pare.* It isn't to oblige *me* I want you to give up that confounded club of yours, and all the nonsense that goes with it. It's so that you can marry Italia. Why, lad, one would think that I was tor-

turing you instead of telling you how to marry your sweetheart. *You* one o' those damned radical rogues, my Dino, the little chap I taught how to handle an oar? Come, come, lad, drop the nonsense. It's being shut up between four walls that put it into you, I'll go bail. Politics! Lord bless you! a capful o' wind will soon blow 'em out of you. They're like weevils in a biscuit, they eat all the good; you can't get rid o' them too quickly.'

'Drea, it is you who will not understand. You are unjust; you have always been unjust to my father. But his ideas are mine. I will not——' he stopped, with a horrible sense of sinking at his heart. What were these ideas to which he professed himself so willing to sacrifice all the rest? But it was imperatively necessary

to make Drea understand the situation. 'I cannot give up my—my convictions. For no reason in the world. Not even to marry Italia.'

There was an instant of terrible silence.

'Are you mad, boy?' demanded Drea, in a sort of subdued growl.

'I am not mad,' Dino answered.

It was a relief to look forward to an explosion of the old man's anger; anything —anything rather than that tone of affectionate trust.

'I am not mad. I don't know why I'm not. I'm unhappy enough for that, or for anything else,' he said, wearily.

'Unhappy——!'

The old man checked himself, breathing hard.

One of the last vendors of cakes and

sweetmeats had gone, leaving his torch of tarred stick to flare itself away in the empty piazza. Drea sat rigid, his eyes fixed upon that spot of light. But he was too deeply moved to keep quiet: the old habit of affection was strong upon him; it was stronger than his pride. 'I would not have believed it of you, Dino. But you'll think better of it, lad; you'll think better of it. One thinks that one has only to pick and chose in life when one is young. When a boat is running straight before the wind any fool can steer her. Later on you begin to find out that things have their own consequences; you might as well ask for a fish without its bones as for a life without trouble. I didn't expect this, though. If it were anybody but you, lad; you that I've knowed from a boy.'

'I—I can't stand this,' said Dino, huskily.

He got up to his feet and walked away a few paces. The old man followed him.

'Lad!——'

He laid his heavy hand upon Dino's shoulder. ''Tis easier to make wounds than to heal 'em. I don't want to be hard on you, God knows. I'll give you another chance, lad. Perhaps you've gone too far with those scoundrels to break off short i' this way—without with your leave or by your leave. Perhaps I was unreasonable to expect it. For the devil shows a man plain enough how to get into a mess like that, but he leaves him to steer his own way out. You might feel it upon your honour not to break wi' them without a word o' warning; and honour's a delicate

stuff, if you handle it you soil it in the touching. I've been an old fool; I ought to have thought of all that sooner. But I'll give you another chance, lad. Look here. We'll let things stay as they are for the present. I won't keep you from seeing her; and I'll give you three months' time to free yourself from all this black business. *Perdio!* 'tis a fair offer. Promise me that in three months you will come and ask me for Italia, and there's my hand on it. Why, lad, I couldn't have trusted my little girl to any man but you.' He spoke in the old cordial voice again, with a cheery ring in the brave words.

'Oh my God,' said Dino, turning away from him, 'what am I to do to make this man understand?'

Andrea's arm fell to his side. He groaned, and put up his other hand to his

forehead as if he had received a blow. 'It can't be, lad—I tell you it *can't* be,' he said in a broken voice.

A party of holiday-makers came out of a house at some distance, crossing the piazza at its farther end. The women were laughing and chattering as they went by. A young man called loudly for silence, and began to play the refrain of a love-song upon his mandoline. The swift, audacious tripping of the music came back to them from a long distance through the stillness of the night, and then again all was quiet.

Andrea took a quick step forward. He seized the blazing remnant of the torch from its hole in the wall, and waved it suddenly before Dino's eyes. The young man gave an involuntary start backwards.

'Oh, don't be frightened,' said Drea,

with an odd laugh, 'I am only looking at your face. I feel as if I had never seen it properly. I want to remember the look of a man who cares more for the good opinion of a pack o' lying scoundrels than he cares for his oldest friends; a man who could teach my girl to love him; who could steal her heart from her; who could bear to look on at all her pretty little ways, and she all the while not knowing. I'm an old man, and perhaps I don't understand,' he said, with bitter simplicity, 'But I have lived sixty years in this world, and I've been honest. I never betrayed a trust.'

He let the torch fall on the stones between them. The light shone full upon his white hair.

'I loved you like my son, Dino. I would not change places with you to-night.'

As he turned away Dino sprang forward with some passionate inarticulate ejaculation of despair. 'Andrea!—Drea—don't, don't leave me like this. Drea! you are the oldest, the best friend I've ever had; you can't believe.—You must be mad not to see how I love her——'

The old man half paused, then shook his hand with a gesture of unbelief.

'If it had been anybody but *you*, lad—you, that I've knowed from a boy——'

He entered the darkened house, shutting the door behind him.

It had only taken a few minutes; the voices of the women were still audible, and the sound of the mandoline.

CHAPTER IV.

LA MORT DANS L'ÂME.

THE masses of the downs were gray and shadowy; there was only a faint streak of red in the eastern sky, and the whitened stones of the piazza had that peculiar look of stillness which transfigures familiar places seen at early dawn, when Dino came out of the house in which he had spent the night.

The cool sweet air tasted pleasantly to his feverish lips; he stood bareheaded for a moment, drawing in a long deep breath of freshness before he struck into the path which was to lead him back to Leghorn.

But early as it was, there was already some one stirring before him. As he passed the church a slender figure wrapped in a dark shawl moved hastily forward from behind one of the pillars, and a trembling voice said, 'Dino!'

He started as if he had been shot.

'Italia! Italia! *you* there—at this hour!'

He sprang up the steps towards her, and they met just under the fading wreaths of yesterday's festival.

They stood there grasping both one another's hands; it was difficult to say which face looked the paler and more agitated.

'I wanted to speak to you,' she said presently, without lifting her eyes to his. 'Sora Catarina told me you would have to go back to town at daybreak——'

'Yes?' he said, after waiting for a moment.

'I had something to say to you. Because I—I was sitting by the window last night,—it was so hot in there,—and I heard——'

'You heard?'

She drew her hands away from him very gently.

'Don't you see, Dino, that I know it all? I heard what you and my father said.'

He caught hold of one of her hands again, and grasped it between both his own. 'Italia!—oh, my poor child, my poor little girl, to think that you should have heard that! You know I did not mean to hurt you, dear. You know, Italia! you do know, that I love you.'

A wave of colour passed over her white

cheek. Her eyelids trembled, but she did not look at him.

'I heard—what you said,' she repeated in a very low voice.

He pressed her hand more tightly.

'Italia—I——'

The utter hopelessness of it all overcame him; the impossibility of explaining anything. His fingers relaxed he turned away and leaned against one of the rough stone columns. 'You are quite right. There is no reason why you should believe me. But I thought you would,' he said, with a burst of passionate despair.

A quiver passed over her face as he released her hands; she drew them under her shawl, and stood facing him. It was a moment of horrible suffering to Dino before she spoke.

'I do believe you. Please do not be unhappy about that. I cannot understand it—altogether; but I do believe you—Dino,' she answered gently. She hesitated a little in speaking, and her voice faltered over his name. She added more firmly: 'That is what I wanted to say to you. Please do not be unhappy about me. My father —my father wanted you to say that you would give up other things, things you care for, for my sake. But I do not wish it. I only want you to do what is best; what will make you more happy.'

'Happy!' echoed Dino with a groan.

'Yes, Dino, happy. Happier at least than you would have been if you—if you had not found out your mistake in time. It *was* a mistake that you loved me best,' said Italia bravely, crushing her poor little

hands tightly together beneath her shawl ; 'but I know it was not your fault. I know you did not mean to hurt me.'

'I would rather—I would rather have died than hurt you! Yet I deserve every word that your father said. I deserve a thousand times more. I had no right to speak to you when I did. I must not—I cannot ask you to marry me, Italia.'

Her head drooped a little. 'I know it,' she said, almost in a whisper, 'and that is why I do not want you to blame yourself for what has happened. If you have promised things to other people—— My father always said that one must keep one's word.' She turned her face away abruptly. 'I am glad that—that I was not mistaken in everything. I am glad to know that you did love me.'

'More than my life!' said Dino, with a solemn ardour. She looked so simply noble in her sorrow, he could have knelt before her as before a saint.

She drew in her breath sharply with a half sob. 'That is what I wished to say to you. Do not be troubled when you think of me. I shall always trust you. If —if we could have gone on caring for one another, I should always have been your friend as well as your sweetheart. At least—whatever other people claim from you—there can be no harm in my still being your friend; perhaps it may make you glad sometimes to know that there is one person who trusts you.'

She let her hands fall to her side, and drew a step farther back with an action full of the gentlest dignity. 'Will you

go now, Dino? I would rather that you went.'

'I will go. Will you not look at me once more, Italia?'

She hesitated for a second or two, and then, slowly, she lifted her large dark eyes. Her white face above the straight sombre folds of her mantle made her seem like the pale ghost of the radiant Italia of yesterday. His heart gave a great throb of love and passionate pity.

'My poor little girl, how I have hurt you! My poor little child!'

'Don't be sorry,' she said faintly, her eyes filling suddenly with tears. She tried to smile, but her lips only quivered pitifully. She could not speak: she lifted her arm and pointed to the stair.

When he looked back she was kneel-

ing with clasped hands before the image of the Madonna above the closed church door.

. . . . . .

The air was very fresh and cool. The early morning dew was lying thickly on the soft powdery dust of the high road, and on the short crisp turf of the downs. As Dino reached the turning in the path the first red light of the rising sun touched the black belfry above the church, and glittered here and there on some of the higher windows in the village. Far below him, seen between the folding of the downs, a white mist was lying over the motionless gray plain of the sea.

Afterwards, he could never remember very distinctly what he had done with himself that day. There was nothing to call him back to Leghorn. There seemed

nothing to call him back anywhere. Until Valdez should summon him, he was powerless to act: had he not committed himself, his life, his future, had he not delivered it all over, bound hand and foot, into the inexorable grasp of those men? And what did it matter how or when it was disposed of?

For the moment, he felt so indifferent to all that concerned himself that, had Valdez been there before him, he would not have asked him a single question. That he was to forfeit his life in this proposed attempt was so much a foregone conclusion he did not even think of it. He could have sworn that he had never thought of it once since that first branding instant of revelation; but the conviction of it had eaten its way into him until it

had become a part of his slightest, most involuntary action. When he spoke of 'next year,' 'next month,' when he used the very word 'to-morrow,' he checked himself like a man on the verge of betraying a secret; it seemed to him so incredible that he alone, among all the living, breathing creatures about him, should stand unobserved, encompassed by the very shadow of death. When his mother looked at him suddenly he felt that she must read his sentence on his face. At times he was filled with a dull wonder at their blindness; it was like slowly sinking in a quicksand while they stood near, looking on with smiling eyes.

Scarcely more than a week had passed since the blow first struck him. He was, as yet, benumbed, paralyzed by the icy

clasp of the inevitable. He was isolated; cut off suddenly from all his past; the possibility of revolt had not yet occurred to him; the craving for life, mere life, had not awakened; all his experiences had changed at the same moment; he had not had time to grow accustomed to the new conditions, to realise the inextricable inescapable claims of habit. He was like a man shipwrecked, and keeping a precarious footing upon some slippery rock in mid-ocean; his actions, his preoccupations, were so many temporary measures. He was engrossed in the present precisely because he had no future.

Could he have been asked, that is, more or less, the account he would have given of himself. But in truth, he did *not* realise the situation. And how could he?

—while the young blood ran easily and warmly in his veins, and the morning air tasted freshly, and there was no sense of physical effort in scaling the steepest crest of these hills. The very fulness of his life deceived him. He thought himself resigned to lose all because he could not—he was incapable of comprehending the final loss of anything. For the present, his youth, his sense of vitality, were lying dormant, silenced and motionless like that sleeping sea.

But indeed he was not conscious of himself this morning. He walked for hours, steadily, determinedly; stopping at the top of every hill to look back at the country beneath him with a blank mechanical stare. He could never remember of what he had been thinking, or if he had

been thinking of anything at all. There was nothing left of this day in his memory but a confused recollection of wide grassy spaces where the wind was the only thing living, and the face of a shepherd to whom he spoke about mid-day, and the sight of many fields planted with vines.

The man's face came back to him, later, a vivid and detached image, like the fragment of a fever dream. It was after twelve o'clock when Dino passed him, sitting on the side of a hill, eating his dinner of sour black bread, with his sheep scattered about him, and his dog lying at his feet. Dino might have passed without seeing him had it not been for the dog, who started up, growling. And then, at sight of the bread, the young man remembered suddenly that he had not tasted

food that day. The shepherd had merely lifted his eyes for a moment, but without speaking or interrupting his meal. Dino threw himself on the sun-warmed grass a few paces farther on; in the very action of lying down he realised his fatigue. He shut his eyes for an instant or two, then he said with some impatience:

'Eh, *buon' uomo!* are you accustomed to so many strangers, then, that you hav'n't a single word left to say?'

There was a perceptible pause, and then, 'Are you speaking to me, sir?' the man inquired slowly.

Dino laughed.

'My good fellow, do you suppose I am talking to your dog? He did his best by barking; do you think I expected him also to wish me good morning?'

The shepherd looked at him reflectively. It was a strange idea, but then people who came from a distance often expected strange things to happen. He turned his eyes slowly upon the dog; there was something reassuringly unchangeable in the cock of that ear and the accustomed wag of that stumpy tail.

'He does not speak. *È un cane,*' he remarked tranquilly.

'And so am I, or at least I am a *bestia*, which is all very much the same thing, for not telling you sooner that I am hungry. I am very hungry. I've eaten nothing all day. Will you give me a piece of your bread?'

He spoke slowly and clearly, and the familiar words found an immediate response. The man stooped forward, drew

the long knife out of the leathern sheath which hung from his waist under the sheep-skin cloak, and placing his loaf of bread between his feet on the ground before him, he cut it into two pieces. He handed one of them to Dino.

The young man looked at him with a bright smile breaking like light across his face. 'I can't pay you for it. I have not a soldo in my pocket.'

The man continued to hold out the lump of bread.

'Ye said ye was hungry,' he observed presently, and then, as Dino took the loaf with a quick 'Thank you,' his countenance brightened. Here at last was something intelligible. He watched the disappearance of the black morsel with a feeling of sympathy, which was shared in another

degree by the bright-eyed mongrel at his feet.

When the last crumb was finished he rose slowly and moved away a few paces to where a patch of dark furze bushes made a cool hiding-place for a small wooden keg of spring water. He brought the little barrel to Dino under his arm, and held it for him with both hands, while the young man took a long drink with his lips against the bung-hole. Then the shepherd drank also, while his dog fawned thirstily at his feet.

'What good water. Do you bring it up here with you?' Dino asked.

The other nodded his head affirmatively.

'It comes from down there. From the Padrone's well in the courtyard.

'And who is the Padrone?' Dino

questioned lazily. The food and drink had rested him. He lay on his back on the warm turf with half-shut eyes. A vague soft wind wandered over the grass, and caressed his face and hair; all about him on the hill-side was a small continuous sound of tinkling bells, and the steady crop, cropping of the sheep. 'Who *is* your Padrone?' he repeated in a sleepy voice.

The man looked at him in a slow puzzled way. '*Mah! . . . è il Padrone nostro,*' he said after a pause.

He thrust the iron end of his long shepherd's staff into the ground, and leaned upon it with both hands. His face was of the serious Dantesque-Florentine type: a puritanic face, with pointed beard and long straight black hair. He kept his hands

spread out flat, resting his weight upon the palms of them; the finger-nails showed like white spots in contrast to the sun-burned skin.

'He is very rich, our Padrone,' he added slowly, after a longer interval. 'He has one hundred and forty thousand francs of his own, *l'una sull' altra.*' He stared at the ground as if he saw the money lying there in piles: '*Cento quaranta mille lire, l'una sull' altra.*' For fully half an hour he did not speak again.

Dino lay upon the grass and watched him. An insane desire, a fantastic whim, born of no conceivable reason, prompted him to inform this half-brutalised peasant of his real object and intentions. He was seized with a wild craving to explain it all, to tell the shepherd who he was, what he

proposed to do, and how he—he, Dino de' Rossi,—that young fellow lying on his back in the sun, that idler in a workman's dress, without a soldo in his pocket, was in very truth a messenger of Fate, a condemned man, the future assassin of a king.

He looked at the silly sheep all about him, at the peaceful country, at the peasant's patient and serious face. The grim humour of the situation filled him with a sort of desperate inhuman enjoyment. He felt possessed of a mocking devil. He opened his lips to speak, and then, quite suddenly, he rolled over on his face and lay there motionless for many minutes, with his head buried in his arms. He was asking himself if he were going mad.

Presently he rose to his feet. Before leaving he thrust his hand into the pocket

of his coat and brought out a handful of cigars.

'Take these, my good fellow. I wish I had something else to give you. But if you cut them up with your knife you can smoke the tobacco in that pipe of yours.'

The shepherd put out his hand, examined the gift deliberately, then thrust it inside his jacket without speaking.

'*Addio, buon' uomo.*'

'*Addio!*'

When Dino had got a dozen paces off the other man moved, and called upon him to stop.

'Well, what is it?'

'*Grazie, sapete!*' the shepherd said, and held up one of the cigars. Dino waved his hand in recognition.

'*Addio*, signore!'

'*Addio!*'

The moment that spot where he had tasted human companionship was hidden from him by a folding of the hill, instantly, the old spell was upon him. But he walked less quickly now than in the morning; the recollection of Drea's words was farther away; the thought of Italia oppressed his heart with a sort of physical pain; he could *feel* it; but the first unbearable moment of anguish was over, there was a certain languor of exhaustion mingling with all his sensations.

About six o'clock he found himself near the path by which they had crossed the field on the way to the pilgrimage yesterday. Some instinct told him that Italia would not pass that way again. He fol-

lowed the track to the edge of the high road. There was a plantation of young grape-vines on the opposite side of the highway; he crossed over and lay down among the long weeds and grass at the bottom of the dry ditch.

He had not long to wait. Two or three vehicles passed him, cabs from Leghorn, and open carts, all crowded with the returning holiday-makers, and presently—here they were!

He saw Drea first; the old man sat in front beside the driver, his woollen cap was pulled down over his eyes; he looked neither to right nor left. The women were talking, Lucia holding a large green umbrella over them as if to shield them from the dust. Palmira was sitting at the back, her head resting against Italia's

shoulder. The child said something, and as they passed Dino saw Italia turn her dear pale face to answer;—he saw her smile.

There was something in the action, in the mere fact of her smiling, which made him realise as never before all that her sweet love might have meant to him. He saw the detail of the coming years. Beyond the grief and the shock which he knew his end would bring to her, he looked forward; he saw her going on with life, growing older, growing happy again,—a new happiness, in which the old days had no share. The thought of Italia living without him; the vision of long days in summer when the sky would be as blue to her and the wind as sweet as in the past summers which had been *theirs;* the

prophetic knowledge of what must be, of what would be, pressed slowly and heavily upon him, a horror of great darkness. Curiously enough, what he regretted most, what filled him with the most passionate sense of isolation and loss, were the very slightest details of life; the small familiar interests, the old childish remembrances, and little customs, and the young companionship of foolish joyous laughter. It all seemed so dear, so living to him now. And he too was so young.

Poor Dino! He sat there, twisting the long, tough weeds between his fingers without even seeing them, until the sound of approaching voices startled him. He looked up. There were two men walking among the vines, examining the fresh shoots. One was a labourer, the other

a fat Tuscan *propriétaire*, dressed in a sort of loose gray jacket, like a dressing-gown; he had a gray cap on his head, and wore spectacles.

Dino watched him idly for a moment, the idea passing through his mind that this was probably the rich Padrone of the sheep he had left behind him on the hill-side.

After a while the men moved away, and then the silence became unbearable. Dino felt that he ought to be going back to Leghorn, he felt the claim of Sora Catarina's anxiety; but he could not decide to go back among all those people, who knew him and who would speak to him.

He crossed over the field again, and strolled off to the edge of the down. The

moon was rising above the sea. Presently it appeared over the edge of the great grassy slope, white, spent, a visionary thing. The luminous sky was still full of a pink glow in the west; behind this ghostly visitant it had turned to an opaque blue. The great shoulder of the hill made a gray surface of foreground.

Little by little the colour came creeping back into the grass, the moon grew metallic in texture, first golden, then of a coppery red; the down immediately beneath it telling in this half light as a mass of green washed with bronze. Here and there the deep shadow of a patch of gorse made a fantastically-shaped spot of darkness upon the turf. The quick flight of a whirring insect was distinctly audible in this still air; now and

then, from very far off, sounded the cry of some belated bird.

Over moving water the moon may be an enchantress, a weaver of potent spells, but it is on the downs she dominates—the still mistress of the night, of the lonely empty country and the lonely empty sky.

Yet Dino noted nothing of the beauty around him. He was not in despair now, he was not even suffering; he was worn out, inert, it was as if the apathy of death had fallen upon his soul.

CHAPTER V.

CHOOSING.

FOUR days later the Marchese Gasparo was on his way to Andrea's boat-house.

There was no brighter appearance in the street that day than the countenance of this young soldier as he walked briskly along, with alert glances, his head well up, and his mind full of pleasant thoughts, which every now and then made his handsome face flush with an unconscious gleam of interest and amusement. Life was full of interesting things to Gasparo—and flattering things as well. Only this morning he had heard from the Colonel of his regiment

that he had been selected to act as one of the King's body-guard on the occasion of the approaching review at Rome. He had the letter now in his pocket. His mother, too, had been unexpectedly generous of late in the matter of supplies; at the present moment he had quite a little stock of crisp bank-notes carefully stowed away in that inner pocket. Altogether he felt himself in a brilliant and successful vein of luck.

It seemed almost a pity that so much confident good-humour should be exposed to any unwelcome shock or jar, and it was with a distinct feeling of annoyance that, as he turned out of the noisy Via Grande into the quieter expanse of the quay, his quick eyes recognised a familiar figure in the person of a short, middle-aged man coming slowly towards him.

They were too near to one another for any affectation of ignorance to seem possible. Gasparo looked sharply up and down the street, then, with a peremptory nod and a careless greeting of 'Well, Valdez!' attempted to pass on.

Unfortunately the driver of a heavy cart laden with white blocks of Carrara marble had also selected that especial moment in which to cross into one of the narrower streets. The road was completely blocked by the unwieldy mass of stone and the four straining white oxen. The two men would be forced to wait at the same corner; Gasparo took in the awkwardness of the situation at a glance.

'I hear that you have called three times at my house for the purpose of seeing me,' he said; 'I have no objection to your call-

ing there, not in the least. That is a matter for you to settle with my servants who answer the door. But if you have any hope of the Contessa Paula taking you back on my recommendation, why, I may as well tell you now, my good man, that it was on my recommendation that you were dismissed.'

'So I understood from the signora Contessa herself,' Pietro Valdez answered quietly; 'and that is precisely why I did myself the honour to call upon you, Marchese Balbi. It interested me to know your reasons for what you had done.'

'And pray, what leads you to suppose that I should think of giving you a reason for whatever I may think fit to do?' Gasparo demanded, with a short, scornful laugh.

Valdez shrugged his heavy shoulders; he seemed to consider that the question

required no answer. 'The signora Contessa Paula had engaged me as her music master at a fixed salary for six months. I gave her perfect satisfaction. It interests me to know what arguments you used to secure my dismissal,' he repeated, with absolute self-command.

'I might, if I had chosen, have told her that you were an insolent scoundrel. As it happens, your impertinent republican theories were quite sufficient. We do not choose to assist socialists to live; neither I nor my friends.'

Valdez bowed gravely. 'That is what I wished to know. I have only to thank you, sir, for the information.' Then he smiled. 'I did not know—I was not aware that you did me the honour of interesting yourself in my political convictions.'

Gasparo's look of negligent scorn was fast passing into an expression of quicker anger. He contemplated Valdez in silence for a moment, then he said sharply: 'You are uncommonly mistaken if you think I care a rap how you get yourself into the hands of the police. You're safe to do that sooner or later. But I do mind about your leading Dino de Rossi into mischief. You've got him turned out of one place already through your infernal rubbishing nonsense; you had better be careful how you do it again.'

Valdez laughed.

'I've known Dino de' Rossi since he was a little chap of ten years old. He's a good fellow is Dino; and very loyal to his friends. Will the signor Marchese excuse my suggesting that it might be well if all Dino's friends were equally loyal to him?'

'And what the devil do you mean by that, sir?' said Gasparo, facing around abruptly and speaking in a fiercely challenging tone.

'This is the direct way to the house of old Drea, the fisherman, whose daughter is Dino's sweetheart. I have had the pleasure of seeing her: she is a very good, modest, innocent young girl. But there are other boatmen in Leghorn, signor Marchese; men to whom it might matter less in the end if you took to frequenting their houses every day.'

'I—— *Perdio!* if I thought you knew what you were saying—— If I considered you anything but a meddlesome fool, I would——'

He raised his eyes, looking about him as if in search of some term strong enough

to express his meaning, and it so chanced that his gaze fell upon the rubicund countenance of our old acquaintance of the Telegraph Office, the leather merchant, Sor Giovanni.

The first syllables which the young Marchese had spoken in an angry tone had reached that worthy tradesman's ears as he stood peaceably behind his own counter; but as his sense of wonder grew great with what it fed on, he had insensibly edged nearer and nearer to the scene of the encounter, until there he stood in his own doorway, both thumbs thrust into the band of his leather apron, his fat cheeks and glassy eyes fairly beaming with gratified curiosity.

A very little thing appealed to Gasparo's light-hearted sense of the ridicu-

lous. He burst now into a fit of most unaffected laughter.

When he recovered himself he had lost the thread of his discourse.

'You may be sure of one thing, my man: the Countess Paula's is not the only house you have lost by *this* morning's work,' he said dryly; and he turned on his heel and walked away whistling.

'By my blessed patron, San Giovanni! I should not like to be in *your* shoes, friend Pietro,' observed the fat leather merchant in an awed voice, gazing up the street with profound respect at the Marchese Gasparo's receding figure. 'I should not choose to be in *your* shoes, not I. *I* know the young gentleman,—Livornese born and Livornese bred. It's no joke, let me tell

you, to get on the wrong side of the account book with a Balbi.'

'Well, well,' said Valdez, half impatiently; 'it's only another example of the surprising contagion of folly. There were not fools enough in the world this morning apparently, and I have taken care to add one more to the number. 'Tis not a hanging matter; that's the best one can say for it. And so good-day to you, Sor Giovanni.'

'Wait a bit, wait a bit, now,' said solid Sor Giovanni soothingly. 'I just want to ask you a question or two now about Dino de Rossi. The Signor Marchese was speaking about young De Rossi, eh! eh! I have sharp ears, friend Pietro, and it seemed to me that there was talk of our Dino's falling into doubtful ways. That's bad, you know—very bad. I had some

thought of offering him a place in my business once; he is a good accountant, I am told, and would hardly expect much of a salary if one took him in when he was under a cloud, so to speak. I thought of it the day he left the Telegraph Office, but I waited—I waited to make him the offer. There's many a man has turned up his nose over the fresh loaf at breakfast-time who was ready to say his prayers over the crust at supper. It's all a question of supply and demand. One sees these things in the way of business.'

'Ay, there's small difficulty in seeing the duty one owes to oneself in the way of business,' said Valdez in his quiet way.

'E—e—eh, friend Pietro! *che volete?* Half the world is for sale, and the other half in pawn; you know the saying. But

about this Dino, now. He is a friend of yours? You could answer for him, eh?'

'I answer for no man, my good Giovanni. And as for this young De Rossi; I have seen him, it is true. I knew his father; but——' He shrugged his shoulders significantly.

'See there, now! and I who counted upon your telling me more about him; for I know nothing against the young man myself, nothing but that he's a little over fond of the sound of his own voice, and for that matter he's young, he's young. He's at the age when every donkey loves his own bray. I don't know any other harm in him.'

'Harm in him? No. There's no harm in a weathercock if what you want to know is which way the wind is blowing,' said Valdez carelessly, and apparently

quite absorbed in arranging the heavy folds of his dark circular cloak with the green lining. In reality his mind was full of a new plan for hastening their journey to Pisa. Clearly it would not do for Dino to show himself too often in his company.

Meanwhile Gasparo was hastening towards Drea's house, with just that amount of additional pleasure in the action as would naturally follow on the sense of successful opposition to somebody else's will. As for Dino,—Gasparo saw no necessity of thinking about Dino. In any case, Dino could not afford to marry, and even if he *did*,—for, in arguing a point in one's own favour, why not take both sides of the question?—even if he did marry, there were other girls in Leghorn beside this brown-eyed Italia. 'Little witch! I wonder

if she guesses what she could make me do when she looks up at me with that innocent baby face of hers?' He sauntered down the steps with an expression of deepening enjoyment, a glance of expectation.

She was sitting in the old place, by the corner of the wall. Her sad face brightened a little as she looked up at the sound of footsteps and saw the young Marchese approaching her. She rose instantly, but she waited for him to speak.

'My little Italia! you look very pale. What is the matter? Has anything been troubling you?'

'I am quite well, sir, thank you. I am only tired.'

'And what has been tiring you, then? Too much pilgrimage, eh? Too many prayers in a cold church; is that not so?'

He looked at her more closely.

'You are quite sure the father has not been scolding you?'

'Oh no, sir, my father never scolds me.'

'Because I have brought something with me to restore good humour to a dozen angry fathers. See here, little one,'—it seemed at first sight a curious name to apply to that tall, slender girl with the sad eyes, but there was something childlike and unconscious about Italia's beauty which suggested the use of caressing diminutives—'see!'

He drew a small fancifully-embroidered case out of an inner pocket and opened it before her. Inside were five crisp pink bank-notes of a hundred francs each.

'There, Italia *mia!* You can tell your

father that is what my father meant to give him,—and the other two hundred francs are for interest. Tell him he has not lost by waiting.'

'Signor Marchese!'

It was pretty to see how the colour flushed all over her face and throat, to the very border of her scarlet handkerchief. 'My father will be so happy,—and so proud,' she said shyly. She did not dare to touch the little portfolio until he tossed it gaily into her apron, and then she turned it over with a childish pleasure in the bright colours and gilt thread of the embroidery; it impressed her more than any amount of money.

'I wonder what father will do with it? He will not know what to do. We were never rich before,' she said at last, looking

up at the young man who stood before her with grateful shining eyes.

Gasparo was watching her intently. His own face flushed and softened as their glances met. He tossed back his head with an air of bright decision.

'Should you like more money,—a great deal of money, which would be all yours to spend as you please. Should you like to be rich, Italia *mia?*'

'Oh no,' said the girl quickly. And then she laughed. 'I should not know what to do. My father always says it is not enough to have money, one must have brains to spend it. And I should be miserable. I should be like one of those ragged little sparrows over there if you put it in a fine gold cage. I should always be wanting to get back to the old ways.

I think even the smallest bird must enjoy its wings.

'But suppose some one was with you in the cage? Some one who was very good to you and looked after you? Do you think you would not like it better then?' he asked in the gentlest voice. And then, as she did not answer immediately: 'Listen, my Italia. I have heard some foolish story of your betrothal to that young De Rossi,—to Dino, but it is not true; is it? You are not *promessa;* your father told me so only the other day.'

He moved a little nearer, so that his handsome glowing face was very close to hers. He was very much in earnest now; inclination and the sense of opposition were firing the old rebellious Balbi blood;

with that air of tender deference tempering the bright audacity of his presence, he looked the very incarnation of persuasive joy; the divine glamour of success was like an atmosphere about him; he carried himself with the compelling confidence of a young god;—it was Bacchus wooing Ariadne beside the rippling sea. 'My Italia, you are not betrothed?' he repeated softly.

Her face had turned very pale: her lips quivered.

'No.'

'Ah,' said Gasparo, drawing in his breath quickly.

Her thick dark hair was loosely twisted into a heavy knot; and pinned back just above the nape of her neck. One long waving lock had escaped from its fasten-

ing, and lay across her shoulder. The young man looked at it, and then just lifted it with the tip of a finger.

'One of my ancestors married an Infanta of Spain. But I am Gasparo Balbi; I can do what I choose, and nothing can alter that. A Balbi does as he pleases.' He put his hand against her cheek and turned the averted face towards his own, very gently. 'Look at me, Italia. Don't you know that you can make me commit any sort of folly when you look at me with those big eyes of yours? My little Italia, next week I shall have to go away, back to Rome. But I care too much for you, —very much too much,—to leave you as I found you, you little sorceress! Now listen. Before I go I want you to promise me that some day you will marry me.

Do you hear, Italia? I want you to say that some day, very soon, you will be my wife.'

'Oh, no—no!' she said, in a frightened whisper, keeping her eyes fixed upon him and starting back.

'But I say—yes!' repeated Gasparo smiling. Now that the die was cast, he could scarcely understand how he had hesitated; she was so simple, so sweet, so well worth the winning—in any fashion—this brown-eyed daughter of the people.

He would have taken her hand, but she drew back and stood against the old stone buttress of the bridge. Her face had grown grave with the expression it wore when she was singing. She shrank back, her two little sunburnt hands hanging down and clasped tightly before her.

'Signor Marchese——'

She hesitated for an instant, and her eyelids dropped. 'It is—it is very good of you to take so much trouble about me. But what you say is quite impossible. I could never marry you, never. I am not a lady, and I don't want to be rich or —or—anything.'

Then the colour rushed back to her cheeks, and she lifted her head and looked at him full in the face.

'You have been very good to my father, —and to me, sir. And I knew you when we were all children, so you will forgive me if I take a liberty. I *never* should care for you, sir: I love Dino. We are not betrothed'—her eyes filled with tears, —'he can never marry me; and he and my father have quarrelled. Perhaps I shall

never see my Dino again. But I do love him,—dearly,' she said, with a half sob.

When Gasparo had gone the sobs came fast and faster. Life had suddenly grown full of confusing pain; it was bewildering. And Dino seemed so far off. She knelt before her bed, in the little inner chamber, and pressed her hands hard before her face in the effort to recall the very sound of his voice when he spoke to her. She tried to feel again the warm strong pressure of his hand upon hers. And she loved him so! she loved him so! the poor child repeated to herself over and over. How *could* he bear to leave her? how *could* he let anything come between his love and her?

But after a while the sobs grew quieter: she still knelt, gazing straight before her

with an expression of sweet and ardent belief upon her tear-stained face. The words he had spoken at the church door had come back to her. '*You know I never meant to hurt you, dear. Italia, you do know that I love you.*' She said them over in a whisper, like a prayer, looking up at the little picture of the Madonna above her bed. No other words would come, but surely our pitiful Lady of Sorrows would hear and understand.

She was not altogether to be pitied, this grief-stricken Italia. For to her, at least, in time, could come that great reward, —the sense of having lived a faithful life; in which the first indeed could be the last; a life wherein no loved thing has been forgotten, and memory and belief are alike sacred.

When Drea came home from his morning's work he found everything in order. His dinner was ready for him beside the fire. He ate it in silence; seeming to take very little notice of his daughter's white cheeks and heavy-lidded eyes. But as he sat smoking his pipe after dinner, he put out his rough hard hand as she passed by in front of him, and drew her down gently upon his knee.

'Don't fret, my little girl; don't fret now,' he said tenderly, and stroked her ruffled hair.

Then he added cheerfully. 'Come now! you said the young Padrone was going to make me a present. Let us hear about it. Good Lord, it must be a matter of twenty years since any one has thought of making me a pre-

sent.—And I'll tell you what, my girl. It's full moon to-night. If you like, I will take you out in the boat with me, when I go to look after the nets. And so courage, my little one, courage! Lord bless you! it's only in a storm one can find out who's a good sailor. And so cheer up for — what's an old father good for if it isn't to keep those pretty eyes from getting red with crying? And the good God lets a man do, but He doesn't let him overdo. He's no fool, is Dino. We're not at the end of the matter yet.'

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE BUOY.

THERE was no difficulty in arranging for that journey to Pisa. As soon as it was settled that they were to go by water, to row themselves the fifteen miles of the old disused canal, Dino volunteered to have the skiff in readiness at a moment's notice. 'I want to be away from here. The sooner we start, the sooner it's all over, the better pleased I shall be,' the young man insisted impatiently.

Ever since his return from Monte Nero he had done nothing but urge upon Valdez the necessity of some immediate action; if

it were only to go on this trip to the next town to secure the purchase of the revolver, at least that would be something accomplished. A curious restless gloom had fallen upon Dino's open countenance. It was as if he could never quite free himself from the scathing bitterness of old Andrea's reproaches. He longed for action, definite action, however distasteful. Each slow bright day which passed seemed a long space of painful suspense until he stood cleared in the old fisherman's eyes. 'He may think me a madman if he pleases. He can never think of me again as a coward,' the young man told himself bitterly. Valdez could understand nothing of this sudden change in him.

'You puzzle me, lad—and you lack patience.'

'Patience!' repeated Dino, 'and what for pray? I have read in some book that it is faith, and not prudence, which has power to move mountains. What does anything else matter so long as we have the faith?'

Valdez looked at him very gravely.

'You are sneering, my Dino. And I find that, as a rule, people who distrust or deny their own emotions are justified by many of their subsequent actions in the lack of faith. Don't do it, boy. Not to believe in others,'—the old republican's eye flashed,—'not to trust in others, is to reduce life to a mean habit,' he said.

They were sitting in Dino's own room, and the young man's gaze wandered restlessly over the walls; it seemed as if he were trying to learn by heart the position of each small familiar object.

'Why, it is like a bit of the old days back again, Valdez, to hear you lecture one!'

'Ay, lad.'

The elder man was following out his own train of thought. 'Perhaps I ought not to be so much surprised at the way it is taking hold of you. Until one is two or three and twenty one thinks of oneself: after that one is preoccupied with life, its combinations and its issues. And life is the bigger thing of the two.'

He stood up and laid his sensitive, long-fingered, musician's hand upon Dino's shoulder. 'Then that is settled. Bring the boat around to-night; and we start early in the morning,' he said slowly. He looked hard into Dino's face, and his lips worked as if on the point of adding something. But whatever it was the words re-

mained unspoken. He turned away, and a moment later Dino heard him wishing Sora Catarina a grave '*Buon giorno!*' as he passed through the outer room.

Later in the day Dino had spoken to his mother about his intention of absenting himself for an expedition of two or three days to Pisa. To his surprise Sora Catarina made not the least objection.

He postponed telling her until the last possible moment, acting in this on the opinion he had once heard Drea express about an angry woman's scolding. 'When a woman's got a tongue in her head, the wise man never speaks to her until he's putting his hat on; for it's no matter how hard the wind blows so long as it blows from astern.' But Catarina had not justified this prevision.

It was easy to see that she had something on her mind from the anxious glances which she kept casting in her son's direction, but it was not until he was just at the door and ready to start that she laid down her knitting resolutely, and said:

'My Dino, do you think your mother has gone blind? If you won't speak, I must. But things were different once. When you were a little lad,—it doesn't seem so long ago to me as to you, my boy,—you didn't wait for me to call you when you had hurt yourself. You were quick enough in coming to your mother when anything was paining you *then.* And a woman loses enough in seeing her children grow too big for her arms to hold 'em; —there's no need of their hearts outgrowing her as well.'

She spoke in a plaintive tone, her voice growing more and more complaining as she went on with her remonstrance; and as she ended she shut her lips tightly and took up her knitting again with an injured expression. 'Whatever you may choose to say, Dino, your mother is not blind.'

'Nay, mother, that is the last thing I should think of saying. But what is it now? You must not take fancies in your head about me, mother. I've not been complaining of anything, you know.'

'Oh, if it's a fancy in my head of course that's the end of it! I've nothing more to say; if it's a fancy that it's more than a week now since I've seen you sit down to eat your dinner like a Christian, as if you knew whether the dish before you were boiled beef or a boiled bone. And perhaps

it's my fancy, too, those black rings under your eyes, and the new trick you've learnt of sighing!' She threw her knitting down upon the table, and crossed the room to where Dino was standing.

'My own boy, do you think I can't see that you are breaking your heart about that little girl, that Italia? And it's of no use, my Dino: believe your old mother in this. Her head is turned; she won't have a word more to say to you. There's no harm in the girl, but her head is turned.'

She hesitated for a moment, watching him anxiously. 'Dino! you know if I care for my other boy, my young master, that I nursed and looked after till I hardly could tell which I was fondest of, him or you. But, my Dino, he goes too often to Andrea's, does Gasparo. And that girl

takes after her mother—a poor washy, big-eyed thing, who never knew if her soul was her own to pray for until she'd asked her husband. And the girl takes after her mother.'

'You said once you would not speak hardly of Italia again, mother.'

'I said once—I said once! *Santa pazienza!* it would be a fine task to remember the things one has said once. And besides, I'm saying nothing against her; the Lord keep me from it. Girls! I've been a girl myself. And you know our Leghorn saying—when you want to marry a girl off 'tis easy work doing it; with four rags and four tags you can send the devil from one house into another. But, my Dino, listen.' She laid her hand rather timidly on the cuff of his coat

sleeve; what she was going to say would displease him, and she wanted to propitiate him—not to seem as if she too were concerned in his disappointment. 'My Dino, at Monte Nero, we were speaking, between us women, of the young Marchese. And Lucia said she wondered if he would be thinking of marrying soon; she's like all other old maids is Lucia; she can't see a man in the next street without wondering what he thinks about marriage. And Italia looked up; you know that innocent sort o' way of hers; and "Oh no," she says, "Sora Lucia. Oh no," she says. "The Marchese Gasparo is not in love with any of those fine ladies he knows. He told me so, only yesterday," says she. And then I just looked at her. "And pray how did he come to be speak-

ing to you about anything of the kind?" I asked her. And perhaps I spoke a little sharp, for she turned very red, and then she looked at me with her big eyes without speaking, as if I was a painted image of one of the blessed saints. And then she said, "He told me because he was speaking of what his mother wished him to do." His mother! That would be the Signora Marchesa. And it's a proper thing surely that a little chit like that should know more about my old mistress than I do. Yes. "He was speaking of what his mother wished him to do." His mother indeed! not even the Signora Padrona, or the Signora Marchesa, but "his mother!"—that is what she said.'

Dino remained silent.

'Ah,' Catarina went on, merging her

particular grievance in that general sense of relief to be found in indiscriminate complaint, 'ah, it's small wonder perhaps that the young master has never been near his old nurse, or given me so much as a "good morning," since the day he came back to Leghorn. And so fond of his old Catarina as he used to be! I remember him when he had the fever; not a spoonful of medicine would he touch if Catarina was not there to give it to him. But things change in this world, they do; it's a pity, while they're about it, they don't sometimes change for the better. There'd be more change i' *that*.'

Dino smiled faintly. 'Well, well, mother! there's no good fretting over what can't be helped. Don't worry yourself, that's the most important.'

'Ah, don't worry! that's a man's way all over. As if one sent out to the market to buy trouble, for fear of not having enough at home! But it's easy work telling your mother not to worry, Dino, when she sees you going about with such a look on your face.'

'Nay, mother, suppose we let my face take care of itself.' He mastered his impatience with an effort, and added, 'If you would only believe me you would not make yourself so unhappy. Italia and I understand one another perfectly.'

'Well, if that's what you and she call a perfect understanding, 'tis a pity you don't try mistaking one another for a little. It might make you both look a bit happier. It was more like a funeral, coming home the other day, than anything else that *I*

could give a name to. Not that I'm ever i' the right.'

Sora Catarina ended with a stifled sob. She had known from the beginning that no good could come of speaking of this matter to Dino. He was like his father; he might act from impulse, but he would never change his purpose for any one's asking. And now that she had spoken, it all happened precisely as she expected. She went on crying quietly, with a feeling of having only succeeded in verifying her own lack of influence.

But Dino was more deeply affected than appeared on the surface. Like a great many over-sensitive people, who dread and foresee pain, he often denied its very existence; but the pain remained. The idea of Gasparo's growing intimacy

with Italia haunted him like an impending sense of evil. A wild plan of warning old Drea, of insisting upon seeing and speaking to him, began to assume more and more of the character of a resolve in the young man's mind. But if he went there to-night Italia would be at home ; he could not expose himself to be insulted before Italia ; and to-morrow he was going away. There was no use in writing, Drea could only read his own name.

Dino's mind was full of these considerations as he walked down to the Old Port. It was a foggy night, the full moon just rising over the hill-tops shone through a thick white veil ; but his plan was only to secure the boat to-night, and row it across the Port to the mouth of the canal. He would leave it moored there for the night ;

and he knew every inch of the harbour, the fog could make no difference.

It made this difference, that, coming out into the air again from the small stove-heated room where he had been sitting longer than he expected, engaged in bargaining with the owner of the boat, the singular beauty of the night came upon Dino like a revelation.

It was an absolutely white night; the fog hung low above the water. Overhead the full moon shone in a clear blue transparent sky. From the land the harbour looked enshrouded in a clinging cloud; but to any one on the level of the water the fog appeared as a resplendent and glorified vision, a lower heaven of luminous vapour, under which the dark oily-looking sea lay motionless, like a thing

asleep. Twenty paces off the largest ship in port only loomed indistinctly, the merest ghost of a vessel, dim, shadowy, unsubstantial; the red and green lights in the rigging were indistinguishable a dozen yards away. They sprang suddenly into visible existence, piercing the whiteness like living jewels, as the boat neared the ship's side. The air was strangely sonorous; the faintest sounds—the laugh of a sailor in the forecastle, or the distant thud of an oar—were exaggerated out of all natural proportion. It was impossible to judge of distances; everything was white, shining, impalpable. On the darkest night there would have been at least some gleam of a signal lantern to steer by; but this was like being lost on enchanted seas of light.

'*Una notte stregata;* a white night is a

witch's night,' said the sailor lad who came down to the steps at the landing to bring Dino the oars for his boat. 'Keep your eyes open, comrade, or you'll be running into something before you've time to sing out an *Ave*.'

'Ay, ay,' answered Dino cheerfully, stepping into his skiff and pushing her off from shore.

He paddled gently along; the soft moist air was pleasant upon his heated face, and there was no reason for hastening; until to-morrow there was nothing more to be done. The strange appearance of the night was so alluring he felt tempted to make a wider circuit before fastening up his boat. He turned the prow in the direction of the outer sea-wall, away from the shipping, just dipping his oars into the water with a scarcely conscious motion.

He was rowing in the direction of a certain large red buoy, upon whose broad surface he and Italia had often played as children, when to be left there by Drea while the old fisherman went to look after his nets was to be left in possession of a wonderful floating island, a country which no one else claimed, and where the little playmates reigned supreme.

The place was so much associated with the thought of her that, as he drew nearer, it was scarcely strange to Dino to hear what seemed a far-off echo of Italia's singing; he listened to the full contralto notes as if in a dream. It was all a part of the white magic of the night.

His boat moved noiselessly forward; the round outline of the buoy rose close before him. The sound of the low singing

had stopped; but was there not something darker, the outline of a seated figure, upon that floating surface?

He looked hard, standing up in his boat, and of a sudden all the dreamy mystery of enchantment vanished. This was no dream, no phantom; it was Italia herself—Italia! his Italia, whom he loved. The quick blood tingled to his finger-tips. He called to her, and fastened his boat alongside, and sprang upon the buoy; it was all the work of an instant.

'Italia!' he said, 'Italia! Italia!'

She gave a little cry, and started to her feet, and looked at him. She stretched out her hands; her heart beat in wild irregular throbs; a contraction passed over her face; she did not know herself if she were laughing or crying.

He made some inarticulate exclamation and knelt suddenly at her feet. Her silken handkerchief had fallen to the ground, it had been warm about her throat; he covered the handkerchief with kisses.

Then he looked up at her as she stood above him steadying herself with one hand upon his shoulder. He held out his arms, and she bent her head without speaking, and their mouths met in a kiss.

The movement had given a sudden impulse to their floating pedestal; it swung violently for one instant from side to side, then the oscillations grew less rapid. The white radiance of the night seemed to close more heavily in about them. There was no sound or motion but in the quiet lapping of the waves.

CHAPTER VII.

BELIEVING.

ITALIA spoke first.

'I knew you would come back to me.'

'Darling!'

He kept his arm about her, and she nestled close against him, her soft cheek pressed against the rough woollen of his pilot coat.

'I *knew* you would come back, my Dino. For I love you so. And the blessed Madonna is so very good. I prayed to her. I knew you would come back to me.'

She lay quite still for a moment; all

her weight resting against his shoulder. Then she moved uneasily. 'You are sure it is you, Dino? Really you? It is not a dream?'

'No, dear.'

He bent his head and covered her hair with softest kisses. 'It is no dream, my Italia. It is like being in Heaven.'

'Yes.'

She sighed with perfect content.

But presently she moved a little away from him and turned, leaning both hands upon his breast. 'Dino, it was quite true, all that I told you, up there, at the church, the other morning. That dreadful morning! Dino, when you went away I felt as if my heart were dead.'

'My poor little Italia!'

'She is a very happy little Italia now.

But, Dino, I did mean it then. If you had been obliged not to give up all those things that father does not like—that club, you know, and those bad men—I would have tried to bear it, Dino. I knew you loved me all the same. And it did not matter so much what any one else thought of you. *I* believed you—always. For you do love me, Dino?'

He pressed his lips to her hair again without speaking.

'Dino! say you do!'

'I do love you, my Italia. I do love you. God knows how much.'

'Dear Dino. I thought you knew that I could always be like a friend to you, like your little sister, whatever happened. But ah, this is better! I am so happy, Dino. And it is such a beautiful world; it seemed

so hard to think that we were always to be hurt in it, always apart and miserable; and the happiness all about us, only we shut out from it, you and I.'

She raised her head. 'Do you know, dear, I could not imagine *how* you would come back to me? No! don't tell me, you can tell me some other time; to-morrow perhaps; now, I don't want to know. But I imagined—I don't know why, it was very foolish—I imagined there would have to be all sorts of talking, explanations first. It is so wonderful, Dino, happiness is always so much—so much—what shall I say? so much *happier* that one can possibly foresee it. I never thought of—this. And yet it was so simple.' She had slipped one of her little hands in his, and was pressing his fingers

tightly over hers with her other hand, with the contented air of a happy child. 'But, do you know, you frightened me when you first called out, my Dino?'

'Did I frighten you, Italia?'

She lifted her head quickly, letting his hand fall. The suppressed tone of his voice had pierced her heart with its suggestion of untold suffering.

'Dino!'

She held her face close to his, trying to look into his averted eyes. 'Dino, you are unhappy about something? Is it—Oh!' —she shrank suddenly away from him and her face grew rigid and her lips trembled. 'Is it—my Dino, forgive me for saying such a thing!—is it that there has been some mistake—again? Is it that—that—oh, Dino! that you did—not—mean—*this?*'

The miserable words dropped out slowly, one by one.

Whatever punishment he merited by his lack of generous self-control he tasted in its full bitterness in that hour. After what seemed a long long interval of crushing condemning silence she got up very quietly. Dino rose to his feet at the same moment. As the buoy rocked he would have put out his hand to steady her, but the wild look of anguish on her dear face held him motionless. He did not dare to touch her. He covered his eyes with his hands.

Presently she said, 'We cared for each other even when we were little children. Perhaps that is why it seems so—strange, that you could do this to me.'

Her voice began to tremble. Her

fingers turned cold; she held them clasped tightly together. So many images, so many memories out of the past, rushed back in one confusing flood upon her; she could find no words, no relief, from pain. All the bewilderment and the misery uttered themselves together in an appeal for help:

'Speak to me, Dino!'

Then he uncovered his face and spoke.

'Italia, before God! until I met you here to-night, by chance, I never thought to take you in my arms on this side Heaven. I cannot tell you what this thing is which has come between us. Your father chooses to believe that it is because I am a republican, because I hold opinions which he thinks mad and wicked, that I will not promise to give up all else and—marry

you. He thinks that I have deceived you —that I have acted basely. Italia'—he lifted up his eyes and looked at her—'I cannot tell you what it is which separates us. I *cannot.* Only—it would be better for you if you had never seen me. I wish to God that you had never seen me. I must go away very soon, away from Leghorn and the people I have known all my life. And I go away remembering that I have ruined your happiness. Yet I loved you, Italia. I loved you better than my own soul.'

There was a moment's silence; then she spoke very quietly:

'Dino. My father remembers when they threw an Orsini bomb at the procession carrying the blessed sacraments out of the cathedral. He saw a priest

killed, and some women and children. And it was the republicans who did it. My father saw it. He saw it done.'

'Dear Italia,' said Dino sadly, 'surely you do not think that I approve of such an act? There are bad men in every place; men who hide their own selfishness and folly under every high ideal, and bring it to discredit. They are like the moths who feed on the coverings of the holy vessels on the altar. Whatever I do with myself it shall not be for my own gain.'

His voice changed a little, and he added, 'But perhaps you will not believe that of me? perhaps you will never believe any good of me again?'

She seemed scarcely to understand what it was he said.

'Dino!'

She stretched out both hands with a sob. It was like the cry of a frightened child for mercy. 'Dino, take me back, take me with you. I must be with you. It doesn't matter about all the rest.'

She threw herself into his arms, pressing her cheek against his, clasping his hands closer about her neck; speaking in short hurried sentences, her soft voice broken with sobs.

'Dino — it could not be again, you know. The dear Madonna would not let you go away from me again. Because, you know, my Dino, I could not bear it. I could not. And no one is expected to do what is impossible. It isn't that I'm not willing, Dino. I would do anything you told me to, anything. But if you asked me to lift a weight that was too

heavy for me, I might want to do it, but I could not do it, could I? I should not be strong enough. And I am not strong enough for this—I am not strong enough.'

She kept her face buried on his arm as if she were trying to hide away from what she dreaded. 'Dino. It is such a happy world, dear. I could be so happy. See! even if you had to give up something, some ideas that you care for. My father says all young men have ideas about—about politics and all that—which they change as they get older. And even if you do not change. What does it matter? what does any of the rest of it matter? Dino——!'

He had his arm about her; he could feel her shaking from head to foot with heavy passionate sobs.

'Italia,' he said, 'stop crying. My dear. My poor, poor little child. I can't stand this. Right or wrong, I cannot stand it. It is too much to ask of me. Valdez may do what he pleases, I——' He bent his head and pressed his lips fervently upon her warm loosened hair. 'Italia, I had promised. I had sworn to do something. But I break my oath. Look! I give it all up—for your sake. Look at me, Italia. They will call me a traitor, but I shall not have betrayed you.'

Poor little Italia! She was very weary. She could not speak for many minutes the choking sobs *would* force themselves out despite all her efforts to conquer them. She let herself rest passively in his arms, while he called her by every tender name he could devise. But presently the tears

were fewer; she checked herself; she lifted up her head and looked at him; her eyes were full of love, but the far-away look in them meant even more than that; they were shining with the enthusiasm of high resolve.

'Forgive me, my Dino. I ought to be stronger — I meant to be stronger. I meant to help you, not to make hard things harder for you to bear. Forgive me. I will not do it any more.' She drew herself gently away from him, and he made no effort to detain her. Her voice grew steadier as she went on speaking. 'You could not do that. You could not be a traitor. Not even for us to be happy together. And it would not be happiness, Dino; there would always be a black cloud between us and happiness. It is not as if

we did not know the difference between faith and falsehood, Dino. We do know.'

'I will not, so help me, God! I will not be false to you,' he said roughly.

'My Dino.'

'Italia, why cheat ourselves with words? what is faith or falsehood? what does it all matter if faith means leaving you, and falsehood your making my life a heaven? I love you: the rest is nothing. As for duty—who knows what is duty? Your father thinks it is my duty to stay with you. And another man bids me go. Why should I go? I promised; but is telling you that I loved you no promise? does it imply nothing? Do you tell me to go when I love you?'

'Yes, Dino,' said Italia simply; '*because* you love me.'

She took his clenched hand in both of hers, and smoothed out the fingers with a great tenderness.

'Dear, I am not clever like you; I don't understand things. But I believe you. Dino, if it were for another man, and not for yourself, that you had to decide this thing——'

He drew away his hand, and looked away from her across the rippling sea. The breeze was freshening a little; there were long rents of darkness overhead where the fog was breaking, and showing the blue of the sky.

'Dino,' the persuasive voice went on, 'you might deceive yourself, not knowing, but you would not deceive me—your old playmate—your little sweetheart, who trusts you — trusts you against all the world.

Dino, tell me. Have you the right to break this promise?'

'No,' he said in a half whisper. Then he added, 'But I would, if you told me to.'

'Yes, Dino. But you would not do it now.'

There was a long silence between them, then he asked abruptly:

'Will your father come back here to fetch you?'

'Yes, dear.'

She had been sitting quite still, watching with saddest eyes the dimpling motion of the water. But his speaking seemed to recall her to herself; she sighed heavily, and stooping, picked up her fallen handkerchief, and knotted it about her throat. Then she pushed her loosened hair back

from her temples, smoothing it down with the palms of both hands in a way which was familiar to her: he had watched her do it a hundred times before. She looked up at him, and their eyes met in a long solemn gaze of unspeakable pity and love.

After a moment he took her hand in his very gently and raised it to his lips.

'My good, good little Italia.'

They sat in silence, like two children, holding each other's hands.

. . . . .

After what seemed a long time there was the sound of oars in the distance, and then the shadowy outline of Drea's boat. Dino drew her gently to him. 'It is good-bye, child, God keep you,' he said huskily. Their lips met in a kiss which held the very passion of loss.

In another moment he had stepped from the buoy into his own boat. He went to meet Andrea.

'I have been with Italia. If you like I will listen to anything you have to say to me. But not here. I will follow you to your house,' he said.

He followed at a little distance across the tranquil bay.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST CHANCE.

DREA did not speak until they stood all three in the shelter of the familiar low-ceilinged room. Then he said, 'I should like to be alone with Dino.'

He waited until Italia had closed the door of the inner chamber behind her. He waited, standing in the firelight, his powerful knotted hands hanging loosely beside him; his gray head bowed upon his breast. All the fire had gone out of the old man; he looked broken-down.

Presently he spoke.

'I did not expect to see you here

again, but perhaps it's as well—it's as well.'

He stopped, and fumbled in his pocket for his old pipe. He lighted it automatically, and there was something in the action which seemed to make him feel more like himself.

'I've been troubled, lad; sore troubled,' he said, not looking at Dino, but staring straight before him at the blazing wood upon the hearth. 'Sore troubled. It's like a storm out of a clear sky. First you, lad; first you, and then the young master. I counted upon you to help me take care of the little girl, Dino.'

He spoke with long pauses between his words.

'Your father was my friend once, an' I trusted him, an' he betrayed me. I never

told you before; it didn't seem fair-like; but he betrayed me. He thought to take everything for himself. But you can't get happiness i' this world without doing something for it; it isn't enough to be willing to rob others. There's no cheap way o' cheating Heaven, lad; a man can't buy Heaven at half-price.'

He sat still for a few minutes breathing heavily. Then he rose, and, taking up the candle, he crossed the room, and unlocked the door of a small cupboard, in which Dino had always known him to keep his few valuables; his certificate from the captain of the shipwrecked steamer; his dead wife's silver-mounted rosary, and whatever money he happened to possess. He returned holding in his hand the embroidered portfolio full of bank-

notes which Gasparo had left with Italia.

'Some o' it has to be taken back to the young master. But there's three hundred francs in there, lad, o' my very own. I earned it fairly; and the old master always meant it to be mine. Three hundred francs! It's a deal o' money that. I don't know as I ever saw so much money together before.'

He smoothed the folded notes with eager trembling fingers.

'It's all yours, lad; all of it. Take it and pay off these men as have got the hold on you. It's a deal o' money that—three hundred francs. More than a man could put by in five years' saving. I never could save nothing myself. They'd do many things for that, they would. You can pay 'em off easy.'

And then, as Dino made not the smallest movement to grasp the proffered money, 'Here, take it, boy,' he repeated, trying to thrust the little roll of notes into the young man's clenched hand. 'Take it; it'll be more than made up to me if you are good to my little girl.'

It was impossible to make him understand that the money could make no difference.

'It's three hundred lire, that's what it is. Three hundred lire,' he said doggedly; 'and I earned it, fair, that night o' the wreck. I never thought then it would have to go to pay off rascals; but I'd do more than that, I would, to please the little girl.'

But at last Dino's persistent refusal roused the old man to something more like anger. 'If you won't, you won't. It 'ud

have been more above-board to have said it from the beginning.—If you must drown yourself, at least drown yourself i' the deep sea. That's my way o' thinking.—You could talk there all night; it's easy work talking. *Colla lingua in bocca si va a Roma* —a man can get as far as Rome if he has a tongue in his mouth. But it proves nothing; it proves nothing.'

He pushed the bank-notes across the table, flattening them out under his strong fist. 'There 'tis. And now take it or leave it, for there 'tis before you. You can choose.'

Dino rose and reached his hat. 'There are many things you will understand better later on, Sor Drea,' he said simply. Then he looked all about the room. 'I'll not see this again. And I've been very happy

here. If ever the time should come when you think you judged me harshly, you'll be glad to remember that, perhaps,—that I thanked you and wished you well at the very last.'

And then as the old man still sat silent, with bowed head, 'Will you shake hands with me before I go, Sor Drea?' Dino said, coming nearer. He looked very noble at that moment standing there, with the firelight shining full upon his young resolute face.

But Andrea never lifted up his eyes.

'The devil teaches a man how to do things but not how to hide 'em. I thought you was an honest lad at one time, Dino,—I did,' he said bitterly; and let him go without another word.

Drea sat there for a long time after he

heard that closing of the outer door. By and by Italia re-entered the room. She came and went softly, busying herself with the preparation of her father's supper. Presently she came near the fire and knelt before it, screening her face with her outspread fingers from the blaze while she watched the boiling water in the kettle out of which she would presently make the coffee.

She was observing her father furtively under shelter of her fingers, and before long she turned a little and rested her cheek against his knee.

'You must be tired, father, and hungry. And you have let your pipe go out; poor father!' she said in a deep tone of loving anxiety.

'Ay, child.'

Andrea shifted the pipe slowly to his other hand and laid his disengaged fingers fondly upon the girl's thick hair.

There was a silence between them while the water bubbled and hissed upon the hearth. But as Italia stooped to lift the saucepan Drea checked her. He said:

'I've done what I could, child; what I could.'

'Yes, father.'

'*His* father was the same sort before him. I never told you, but Sora Catarina there, she was my sweetheart once, when we were all young together. And his father was my friend, and he took her away from me. And I was fond of her then, I was.'

Italia drew his hard hand down against her cheek, and kissed it softly, without speaking.

'Ay. I was fond of her once—main fond. And 'twas partly for that, perhaps, I always had a sort o' fancy for the lad. I never could bear to be hard on him. An' he's disappointed me. It's i' the breed, my girl; a bad breed, and you can't alter that with wishing. You can't turn a porpoise into a dolphin, no matter how long you leave him in the water.'

As still she made no answer, he added more insistingly:

'I'd have saved you from this if I could, my pretty. I did all I knew how. But you can't get a grip on the anchor when there's no bottom but only shifting sand. Faithlessness—— Look here, girl, it's like poison in one's daily bread.' He stroked her cheek tenderly, 'My girl, it's poison, you *can't* live on it.'

Then Italia lifted up her head.

'Dino is not faithless,' she said gently.

'Girl, no one believes in him. Not a soul. Not even the young master—and they were boys together.'

'I do, I believe in him, father.'

She knelt with clasped hands gazing at the fire, and all the ardour and devotion of her impassioned soul sounded in her soft girlish voice. For the moment she felt superior to all suffering, uplifted to a region of feeling which knows neither lassitude nor reluctant pain. And such love makes all things easy; it floods dry places; it drowns the slime and weeds. It is good, no doubt, to be strong; it is wiser to be the master of our fortunes than their slave. The truth is obvious enough. But we are not all strong, God knows; let us still be

thankful for that divine gift of pity,—tender and loving pity,—the heritage of the outcast; that last possession of the disinherited, of the unsuccessful; who, owning this, shall yet know something, even on this earth, of the very kingdom of heaven.

After a while she rose to her feet; she laid her gentle hand upon the old man's shoulder. 'Come, father. Come to your supper. You are so tired, dear; you must let me take care of you. For the harder things are, father, the more we will need each other's love,' Italia said.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH VALDEZ.

THE sun was not more than half an hour high in the east when Valdez and Dino started in their boat to row up the disused canal to Pisa. It was a mild gray morning. A pearly-tinted scirocco sky hung low above the flat country beyond Leghorn; on either side were stretches of bare ploughed land; the only colour was in the thick fringe of tall yellow reeds which bordered the canal, and on the scarlet-stained leaves of the water plants and brambles which had survived the winter, hidden deep under the faded bents of last year's

grass, in sheltered nooks below the overhanging banks.

It would have been easy to tow the boat: there was a narrow path trodden out along the margin by the feet of the men who still dragged the slow weight of their flat-bottomed barges, laden with barrels of oil and sacks of corn, in preference to sending the merchandise to Pisa by the new line of railway. But Dino liked better the labour of rowing against the sluggish current. The monotonous action soothed him like the reiteration of old words which carried pleasant memories. He felt more himself with the oars in his strong young hands; and the long regular sweep of the blades was like a visible sign of the vigour and force of his determination. About nine o'clock it

felt very warm upon the water. The March sun shining behind the thin gray veil of mist, filled the sky with a diffused whitish glare,—and there was no escaping it, no possibility of shadow. By the time he had rowed eight or ten miles Dino was glad enough to act on Valdez's suggestion, and run the boat to land under the shelter of some drooping alders. They stretched themselves out luxuriously on the short new grass, where a point of smooth ground projected for a few feet from the bank. The water gurgled with a cool liquid sound as it hurried past them, and the air was sweet with the smell of bruised herbs. There was a tuft of scented thyme growing by Dino's feet. He plucked off a leaf or two and held them in his hand while he said :

'It is pleasant being here, Valdez.'

'Ay, lad.'

'I like rowing. I like everything which implies being out-of-doors,—doing something and being no one in particular. If I had to live over again, Valdez, I'd have more to do with men than books.'

'You may be right there, lad, there's no saying. After all, a man's personal experience is the only reality; the rest is mere hearsay.'

Dino crushed the aromatic herbs closer within his hands, and rubbed them over his face. 'Valdez!' he said abruptly, 'that man over there,—in Rome,—you know whom I mean — I know nothing about him; he has done me no harm.'

'No, lad. And I see what you mean. But that's just the puzzling part of it—

when things pull both ways. But there must come a time in a man's life when he ceases to ask himself questions, when he must give up even wanting to know how well he may be doing the work that's been set before him, or else the work doesn't get itself done. For, look you, lad, in a way, what is absolutely bad is nearly as satisfactory as what is absolutely good. It's black or white; and a man—a man, I say—can understand either. But it's the thing between—it's life—which upsets our calculations.'

'It's so damned hard to know that, do what one will, one can never get any credit for it. If you stake your life on any desperate attempt to make things a little better, people always imagine it was your own choice, you liked doing it. They

don't ask what it was that made you give up the pleasantness; if you get credit for anything, it's only credit for a morbid taste for being wretched.'

'Credit from society? credit for what you do? why, lad, who gives credit for anything now, except the tradesmen? And they are not in society,' said Valdez, with a short laugh. He pulled the brim of his shabby felt hat farther down over his eyes. 'Society cheapens life. Makes it full of small interests, small triumphs, small, bitter disappointments. I've been through it; I've seen enough of it in my day.'

'Valdez,' said Dino, looking at him rather curiously, 'you must have been leading a very different sort of life before you came to Leghorn? You yourself must have been very different?'

'Ay, lad, a different sort of fool, most likely. There's a variety in fools, or life would be too monotonous. I've been among a good many people in my time,' he added in his deepest voice; 'but all that's past now. Past and forgotten. And what's over is safest let alone. It's twenty years now since I've been tuning pianos. 'Tis a good trade; and one must live somewhere.'

He rolled over on the damp grass, and thrust one arm up under his head. 'You have had a good deal to do with making me stay there so long, my Dino. I was a lonely man; it has made a wonderful difference to me that feeling that, at any minute, you might be coming in and out, making a noise, knocking about in the old rooms; they would seem quiet enough

without you. You made a wonderful difference.'

'Well! it's over now,' said Dino, pulling up a tuft of grass and hurling it far into the water. 'It's gone like that.'

'Lad, you take things too hardly. I'm an older man than you, and I tell you you should believe in happiness. The flower of life is a gift, Dino, without money and without price. The supreme gifts of the gods can neither be discussed nor deserved. Believe in happiness; expect it; make room for it in your life. Have faith. Faith moves mountains. And happiness is of the swift-footed immortals, and descends only on the garlanded altars of her worshippers.'

The old man was curiously roused out of his usual reticence and quiet. As

they got into the boat again a pale gleam of sunlight pierced through the gray vapour overhead and rested on the distant buildings and spires of Leghorn.

'Ay, twenty years. I've lived there for twenty years,' Valdez murmured, looking back at the shining curve of the white houses beside the sea.

'Shall you go back immediately? I mean—after Rome?' Dino asked presently, taking up the oars.

Valdez glanced at him keenly. 'Maybe I shall, lad. There's no telling. I'll see you safely to the end of your journey first.' After a pause he added, 'We'll wait till it gets dark, and then walk on to Bocca d'Arno. I know a man there will give us a bed to sleep on. And then we can separate for a day. I will carry

the revolver up with me to Rome and wait for you there. The review is not till Friday; your best plan is to go home first for a day. And it's safer if I have the pistol with me. The police might take it into their heads to have you watched and searched at the last moment. You can't tell. And a little extra precaution costs nothing.'

'Why should you think the police suspect anything?'

Valdez shrugged his shoulders.

'*Chi lo sa?* Everything and nothing. There were men I could not account for at the door of your house when I came out yesterday. And that young Marchese friend of yours, I had some words with him in the street. He spoke of your getting into dangerous company. But

it may be only my fancy; who can tell?'

As they drew near Pisa the country stretched before them a flat ploughed plain, of a pale reddish brown, crossed by interminable lines of furrows. There was not a sign of life anywhere about. The light sandy soil of the plain stretched to the far horizon like an expression of unrequited labour; for where the green rows of maize had already pierced the ground the crop promised to be poor and thin and stunted. The country was extraordinarily silent. There was not even a lark singing under that low-roofed sky. The dark line of pine-trees where the king's preserves begin were all blown one way, and only the wind seemed alive, a full and rioting scirocco wind blowing

with insolent unconcern across these empty fields, as though mocking at their record of patient and unsuccessful toil.

The two men left their boat at the last bridge, just outside the city gates. Valdez was familiar with every turning of the Pisan streets. He led the way now, without hesitating, to a small dingy shop not far from the Duomo, where the revolver was soon purchased, Valdez insisting upon going in alone to buy it.

And then for hours they sauntered up and down the quiet thoroughfares, over the bridges, along the quay by the yellow Arno. The deadly stillness of the place weighed with a sort of physical oppression upon Dino. The hours stretched themselves out until he could scarcely believe that it was only in the first freshness of

this same morning that they had turned their backs upon Leghorn. He was in a state of half weary, half dreamy unconsciousness, like a man under the influence of some strong opiate. Emotion was dulled and deadened. He talked constantly to his companion all through that long spring afternoon; he found amusement and occupation in speculating about the passing faces. Anything was better than the silence which threatened him with the awakening of that dull pain, which, whenever he ceased speaking, seemed to make a new clutch at his heart.

It was dusk when they left the small suburban café where they had eaten supper, and passed under an old archway into the high-road which leads to the sea. But, late as it was, they were

not the only travellers afoot and bound for Bocca d'Arno. They had walked scarcely a quarter of a mile before they overtook two peasant women, a mother and daughter, on their way home from making purchases in the town, and presently, as they all four walked abreast along the country road, they fell into converse together. Valdez began questioning the elder woman about the crops. Then he asked her if she sent her children to the communal schools.

'*Che!* schools! yes, indeed! that was a likely idea, to carry the *bimbi* four miles there and four miles back every morning that God sends us.'

The old democrat looked grave. 'And are there many children who cannot read in the *paese*, my good woman?'

'Eh, Signore! There is my second cousin, the *guardia* of the forest, he is an old man now; he has been there all his life, and he gets fifty-six centesimi a day, to support himself and his family. It is likely, is it not? that he should trouble his head if the children cannot read the books? and they are good children.'

'How many has he?'

'E—e—h! *tanti!* Now, two of the boys are grown up enough to work in the wood as foresters. And that helps. He doesn't poach, my cousin,' the woman said regretfully, turning her sensible face towards Valdez; 'another man would, *si capisce.* But my cousin—he cannot see well. And then he misses the game he shoots at. He has no luck about him—not enough to make you wink your eye.'

She walked on a few yards and added, 'The Padrone! ah, yes, that is another sort of weaving! The Padrone is a banker in the city: when he comes to shoot, he brings his luncheon with him in his pocket; two hard-boiled eggs; that's for fear he should leave any bones behind him. Is it not true, Isola?'

Valdez laughed, and the girl walking beside Dino opened her blue eyes frankly and looked up in his face. 'That is true what my mother says. But you are not like your friend there, you do not care for the schools?'

She was pretty, even in this dim light it was easy to see how pretty, with a round babyish face and crisp fair hair. She wore a bright cotton handkerchief knotted over her head, and in her hand she carried a large bundle.

'No. I am not so wise as my friend. But at least I am good for some things,' said Dino, smiling down at her. He put out his hand, 'If you will trust me with it, we are going the same way. I can carry your bundle.'

The peasant girl drew back. 'Nay. What should you do that for?' she objected quickly. Then after a pause for reflection she suggested, 'Perhaps that is the fashion in the country that you come from, to carry other people's burdens?'

'Surely.'

'*Guardate!* But that is quite different. No one would do it here; not even the *sposo*.'

'Are you going to be married soon, Isola? I think I heard your mother call you Isola.'

'Ah, yes; Isolina; that is what they call me. I shall not be married until next Carnival. It is a long time off, but what would you have? When one is poor one must learn to make oneself small enough to pass through the cat's hole. That is what I tell my Pio.' She ended with a laugh, a clear ringing bird-like sound.

'Tell me about him,' said Dino, smiling sympathetically, with a sense of pure comradeship in her youth, such as he had never felt before. All that was living and joyous and young asserted its claim over him; he looked across the road at the two middle-aged faces of their companions with an exaggerated perception of what they had outlived. Life, young buoyant life, seemed the one thing to be valued. He was sick of tragedy. What he wanted

was easy youthful laughter, and the warm bright satisfaction of being. The innocent chatter of this little peasant girl satisfied him better than all the theories about all the universe. He listened in a sort of vague dream to the rippling flow of her talk. When she ceased speaking he yielded to the impulse that was strong within him; he told her about Italia. What he said was very little, only that he and his sweetheart were parted; he put it in the simplest words which she would understand.

She listened; then she turned her bright face towards him, glowing with spirit and brave interest. 'Oh,' she said, 'I know what it is like, for there was a time, one week, when they would not let me speak to my Pio.'

She talked to him now of herself as to an old friend; with the unhesitating frankness of a child; the young man was strangely touched and pleased by her simple confidence.

When the footpath grew narrower she walked on in front of him. She walked well, with an easy carriage; her firm bare ankles gleamed in the moonlight below the hem of her short cotton gown; her loose wooden shoes made a short quick tapping at each step which she took.

The night was very warm and still. On one side of the road the Arno flowed past silently; the pale light in the sky was reflected upon its glassy surface as upon a sheet of metal; it looked like a river of lead. As the moon rose a faint wind stirred softly among the budding branches of the lime-

trees which edge the fields, and the delicate shadows of the moving stems fell upon ploughed land. In each isolated farmyard the hay-ricks, cut close for last winter's fodder, assumed a curiously velvety texture as the moonlight rested on their blanched and weather-beaten tops.

As they drew nearer the mouth of the Arno the spreading pines of the Gombo made a dark line against the sky to their right and across the river. The fields grew wider; the night was full of a new sound which was not the sound of the wind. Dino listened more intently; his quick ear could distinguish the muffled beat of the waves upon the sandy shore.

Presently they reached the borders of the wood; the footpath ended; the soil grew sandy underfoot. At the turning of

the road there were lights burning in some cottages. The peasant women stopped at the door of one of the houses.

'Good-night,' Isolina called out in her friendly voice; 'good-night again; and thank you for the civil company.'

She disappeared amidst a rapturous chorus of welcome from the farmyard dogs. She had brought to Dino a charmed hour of forgetfulness; he watched her turning away from him with an air of regret.

Later, as they lounged upon the beach, smoking their pipes in the still moonlight, Valdez said, laying his hand affectionately upon Dino's shoulder, 'I liked hearing you laugh with that little girl to-night, my lad. You were such a light-hearted lad in the old days. You're fretting now. Courage! my Dino, courage! There are no depths for

a brave heart from which hope cannot mount; hope which outlasts gold and the grave. And, for a man, whatever the consequence of his action may be, even to have meant well, is sufficient excuse in the eyes of the woman who loves him. Excuse? it's a vindication which, nine times out of ten, will make her end by asking him to forgive her suspicion.'

'I know it; but it won't save Italia from suffering,' said Dino quickly.

Valdez was silent. Then he said, 'Did it never occur to you that there is a chance, just a chance, of your getting away after all? Think of the crowd and the confusion. And if you once get outside of Rome the Society will soon find means of taking you safely beyond the frontier. There is always that chance, you know.'

'I don't believe it,' said Dino, turning away abruptly.

But the words haunted him—'There's always a chance'—'always a chance;' they rang their changes upon his brain far into the wakeful night. Once, towards morning, unable to sleep, he rose and groped his way to the door of the hut belonging to Valdez's friend and host. The shore stretched before him, and the moonlight on the wild sea grass. When the moon went under a cloud the wet sand by the edge of the receding wave was of a bright steely blue; far away near the horizon the light still shone, a streak of burnished silver, upon the tranquil sea.

Valdez was sleeping quietly; Dino went back and threw himself down by his side.

It was late when the young man awoke.

The little hut was empty; his companion had gone hours before, leaving behind him a message, a few scribbled words, to say that the fishing-smack which was to take Dino back, by another route, to Leghorn, might be expected to call at Bocca d'Arno towards sunset that same afternoon.

There was food and water in the hut. It was one of those small thatched cabins, built for the use and shelter of the owners of the great stationary nets suspended from beams and worked by means of a crank, of which there are several by the mouth of the river.

Dino spent the long day in the woods. It was a lovely morning when he first went out, with a touch of April sweetness in the air. It is a wild and silent shore. The flat-topped pines grow to the very verge of

the sand-hills. On the sea side the forest ends in a thick undergrowth of dark-spreading juniper bushes, which fill the hollows of the dunes and mingle with the thistles and the tough salt grass. And the wood itself is always filled with the sound and savour of the sea. Before a storm the white-winged gulls flit wildly in and out between the pine tops. There is fine white sand underfoot beneath the moss and the fallen needles, and thick growths of all strong-stemmed aromatic sea-loving plants; blue rosemary, and tufted heather, and great golden-crested reeds. Dino lying in one of those sheltered hollows, with closed eyes, could scarcely distinguish between the melancholy murmur of the trees overhead and the sleepy murmur of the restless waves. The very air had its mingled breath of salt

and spiciness, of the sea and the resinous pines.

By Monte Nero all nature had seemed dead in his eyes ; the downs there had been nothing more to him than an empty hill-side, a dull background to his own dominant existence. But here, in this still wood —perhaps because of his very surrender of that existence—there was infinite charm and interest in every moment of the long calm hours. He felt himself a mere spectator watching the natural life of things. He found occupation for half a morning in seeing the warm spring sunshine creep across the straight pine stems ; in looking up at the tender blue of the sky above him ; in listening to the myriad small noises of the woods ; bird notes, and the tapping of the wood-peckers, the hum of insects, the

cracking and stirring of the branches, and the rustling furtive tread of shy four-footed creatures, young rabbits, and bright-eyed squirrels, or the quick darting of green lizards across the thin, short grass.

Once he reflected, 'They will say in the papers, afterwards, the prisoner passed a day before his crime concealed in the woods at Bocca d'Arno. "Concealed in the woods!" But will it mean *this* to them?' He looked down, between his elbows, at a patch of greenest moss; a miniature pine-tree, some three inches high, raised itself proudly above the other small plants, and a couple of shiny-backed beetles wandered up and down its stem. Dino felt in his pocket for crumbs, and strewed them before the insects, but the motion of his hand frightened them away. Presently a com-

pany of red-headed ants came up out of the ground and attacked the provisions. Two of the ants fought one another for a particular crumb. Dino watched their movements with the intensest interest. When they had vanished—'The prisoner passed the day before committing his atrocious crime concealed in the woods of Bocca d'Arno,' he repeated solemnly, and he laughed aloud.

No one came near him. Once he heard some quick footsteps and the cheery whistle of a woodman tramping along some hidden path on his way home to dinner. And once, from between the leaves of the neighbouring alder thicket—young leaves so brightly green that they might be mistaken for flowers—there came a heavy rustling sound which excited his curiosity. He strolled over to the place, and peered

in between the branches at a pair of those great melancholy-eyed white oxen common to that part of the country.

Something in the presence of those 'slow moving animals, breathing content,' reminded him of his little *contadina.* A sudden wish to speak to her again made him abandon his wood. Inland, a broad, wet ditch, half full of faded sea-heather, divided him from the ploughed fields. He jumped the ditch, and there, hard at work behind a hedgerow, he stumbled upon Isolina.

Her short blue gown was tucked up above her knees ; her scarlet kerchief was hanging loose from her hair ; she was digging away like a man, and her bright, childish face was all rosy and warm with the exertion. She nodded in the most friendly fashion to Dino as he came nearer,

but time was too precious to be wasted on mere talk this busy morning. Only, as he moved away again, she held her spade suspended in the air for a moment, and her round cheeks grew pinker still as she said, 'As you pass through the farther field, will you greet my Pio for me? Give him *tanti saluti*, for I have not seen him to-day.'

'Shall I tell him I left you making the cat hole bigger?' asked Dino, beginning to laugh.

Her white teeth flashed. 'Tell him to dig away at his own end of it.' And presently Dino heard her voice singing as he strolled away between the moist brown furrows.

He had no difficulty in finding Pio, a short, thick-set *contadino*, with a smiling, good-natured face below its thatch of thick,

irregularly-clipped hair, brown hair burnt red by the sun. His face was tanned to the colour of yellow bricks, except at the temples and behind the ears, where there were bits of white skin. He wore a ring on his hand, and used the most singular gestures in speaking.

Dino sat down on the edge of the ditch among the weeds and grasses to watch him at his work. Valdez would have talked of common schools, perhaps of politics ; would have tried most likely to drive some faint idea of social equality and the rights of labour into this sturdy peasant with the Figaro face. The more Dino looked at him the more remote he felt from any impulse of proselytising.

This idyllic love-making, with its simple interests and its simple cares ; its messages

sent from field to field;—its *naïveté*, its sincerity, its security,—ended by plunging Dino into the profoundest melancholy. For the first time he absolutely realised what was this thing which he had undertaken. He gazed at the young fellow beside him; he noted how the strong muscles played along his back as he bent to his work, and the vigorous vital grip of his horny hand.

'Will that piece of ditching be done to-morrow?' he asked suddenly.

The *contadino* straightened his shoulders and kicked aside a heavy clod. 'Na—ay. I'll be at work here all o' Friday, if the master doesn't put me at something else,' he said slowly.

At work here o' Friday, and Friday was the day of the review. Dino's whiter hand

was lying across his knee ; he clenched the fingers together with a sudden passion, and thrust his doubled fist into his pocket. His hand, in his own eyes, had seemed the hand of a corpse.

CHAPTER X.

GOOD-BYE.

LATE that afternoon, as Dino sprang out of the fishing-smack on the stone steps of the landing-place at Leghorn, the first person whom his glance rested on was broad-shouldered Maso sitting on the edge of the quay with his legs and feet dangling over the water. He got up slowly as Dino came nearer, and nodded with cheerful friendliness.

'*I* know that boat you came in. She's a Bocca d'Arno smack, she is. The man who owns her lives at Pisa.'

'So he does, Maso.'

Dino looked rather anxiously about him. It seemed only too probable that old Drea was making one of that blue-coated group of fishermen who were sitting a dozen paces off on a coil of old ropes, criticising the craft that passed at this leisurely hour of the day, when the nets had already been looked after, and there was time for a pause and the smoking of pipes before the night work began. And Dino did not wish to meet the old man again. He shrank from having to feel once more the altered look of that face; all the old affection felt bruised and sore when he remembered it. He would have turned away now without further speech, but Maso detained him.

'Aren't you coming back to work in the *Bella Maria*, Dino? She's short-handed

now with only Sor Drea and me. 'Twas all we could do to manage the nets this morning. I asked the Padrone if you weren't coming back soon."

'Ay; and what did he say?' asked Dino, rather eagerly. It would be a comfort still to know that his old friend could speak kindly of him.

Taciturn Maso took off his round cap and scratched his thick, curly hair with an air of consideration. 'Well, I dunno,' he said dubiously. 'He swore at me for being a fool, as far as I can remember. But *that* wasn't much of an answer—that wasn't. An' yet somehow I didn't seem to miss nothing.'

'But didn't he say anything? Try and remember, Maso; there's a good fellow. Didn't he say: "Oh, Dino is going away,"

or, "Dino has other business to attend to?" He must have said something, you know.'

'Well, he did swear at me. I told you that already. But, good Lord! some people are never satisfied unless the words come in shoals, like the mackerel when the sharks are driving 'em ashore. An' it's Maso here, and Maso there, till I want to put my head in a bucket o' salt water; I do. That's why I like Italia to speak to me,' he added reflectively. 'She never says too much, and her words are sort o' pretty, like the sea in a calm, when the water is just dozing and making a pleasant noise.'

'Have you seen her?—have you seen Italia to-day, Maso?' asked Dino, his heart beginning to beat faster.

'Oh, ay; that's why I came here to

wait for you. I saw your boat; I knew her by the cut of her sails before she was fairly round the point yonder. But I'd ha' brought her in on a shorter tack if I'd had the steering of her—*I* should.'

'What—what was it Italia wished you to tell me?' asked Dino, making a strong effort to control his impatience and not excite the wonder of the honest, slow-witted young fellow by his side.

'It wasn't so much of a message after all, when I think o' it. I say, Dino, you know Sora Lucia? She lives at the top of that big house in the Via Bianchi.'

'I know—I know.'

'Well, you were to go there, now, this afternoon. Sora Lucia wants to speak to you. That was what Italia told me. She told me twice. But, Lord, I'm not such

a stupid as that. I can remember what *she* says fast enough.'

'Very well, then; I'll go now,' said Dino, feeling rather disappointed. Still it was possible that the little dressmaker might have some message for him. He turned back to inquire of Maso how it was that Italia knew of his return so exactly.

'Nay, how should *I* know?' retorted Maso reproachfully. 'You don't suppose I asked her, do you?'

He stood on the quay staring after young De Rossi with a look of the most sincere admiration dawning in his big blue eyes. Dino was in some sort of serious scrape, he reflected gravely. Else why didn't he come back to the old boat? And to have time, and opportunity, and invention enough to get into a serious scrape

was in itself a distinction in honest Maso's eyes. It was almost like being a gentleman. They got into lots o' trouble, did the Padroni.

'It all comes of his having an eddication,' he pondered enviously, leaning against the parapet and looking at Dino's back.

It was not far to the corner house in the Via Bianchi. Dino went slowly up the many stairs; it was impossible to say what he expected, but his heart beat very fast as he stopped before Lucia's door, and at first he was not sure, he could not tell, if there had been any answer to his knock.

'*Avanti, Avanti.* Come in; I cannot leave the work,' a woman's voice repeated briskly, and he opened the door. The first glance showed him that the big room was empty of what he most desired. There

was no one in it but Lucia, who was standing with her back to him engaged in pressing down the folds of a gown with a hot iron.

'Oh. So that's you, Dino; is it?' she said brusquely, without turning her head.

'I came as soon as I got your message. I have only just returned from Bocca d'Arno, Sora Lucia; and I met Maso on the quay.'

'Oh. 'Twas Maso that told you; was it? See there now. And I who always took him for a sort of two-legged sea-calf, with only just sense enough in him to fall in love with Italia.'

'Maso! that fellow!'

'Well, well. I am not talking Latin, am I? *Santa Vergine*, it would be a fine world if all the men in it were to keep their eyes shut because a certain young man—— *Basta.* I understand what I mean.'

She nodded her head several times, and took up another iron, holding it carefully near her face to determine the exact degree of heat.

Dino sat and looked at her in silence. The clock ticked loudly on its shelf, and the dozing cat, awakening to the fact of the presence of a visitor, stretched itself two or three times sleepily, and then made a spring and perched itself on the young man's knee. He rubbed the creature's head mechanically until it purred. Then he put it down gently on the ground and stood up.

'I thought you might have something to say to me, Sora Lucia. But if not I will ask you to let me wish you good-bye now. I have not seen my mother yet: and I am going away—I am going to Rome to-morrow.'

'Ah, Rome is a fine city,' said Sora Lucia briskly. Then she bent her head over her work again and added: 'I, too, have business in Rome. I have a cousin there, my own flesh and blood cousin, who has a shop for beads and rosaries and objects of devotion in the Borgo. Not more than a stone's throw from the house of the Holy Father, as one might say. I may be going up to Rome myself one of these days. It seems as if Leghorn wasn't good enough to stay in any more. The whole world's travelling.'

'*Dunque*, I'll say good-bye without troubling you further, Sora Lucia.'

'Oh, you'll not go without a greeting to the *nonna* first. She's wonderfully pleased when people remember to say good-bye to

her,' said Lucia hastily, putting down her irons with a clatter.

She went to the inner door and opened it.

'Beppi. Run to the grandmother, child, and say that Dino de' Rossi is here and waiting to make her his *saluti*.—And tell Italia that I want her. Say that I want her; do you understand? These children have not so much head as a pin between 'em all,' she said hastily, coming back to her work with almost a blush upon her thin pale cheek.

Dino looked at her with great agitation. 'Does Italia know—— Sora Lucia, if Italia should not wish to see me——'

'She's not here to see you. She paying me a visit,' said the little dressmaker sharply. 'And not the worst tongue in

Leghorn could blame the girl for coming here. It would be a fine thing, indeed, if I had to give up all my friends to please you, Sor Dino! I—*Santa pazienza!*'

The door opened again and Italia came in, leading by the hand a very old woman, who steadied herself at the door, and dropped Dino a series of small tremulous curtsies.

'I don't remember who the Signore may be, Lucia; but you know who he is. I'm a very old woman now, sir; very old. I don't rightly remember how many years 'tis now that I've been living; but I worked for forty year at the marble works, I did; forty year picking over the rags to pack the marble.'

'There, *nonna*, come and sit in your own chair by the fire; that's what you

like best,' said Lucia, glancing half guiltily at Italia.

The girl did not notice her. She had silently given her hand to Dino as she came in. They stood so for an instant without speaking; then she slowly lifted up her dark eyes. There was no young smile in them now, and her dear pale face had grown rigid and strained. She looked as if all the gladness had been killed within her. Only her voice had not changed; its full clear ring sounded like a mockery now after meeting that look of infinite misery in her eyes.

'I wanted to say good-bye, Dino.'

'Yes.'

'And I wanted to ask you, when you go to Rome, could not little Palmira go with you? Will you take her, Dino? Please take her.'

'Palmira? take that child? But, dear Italia, indeed it would be quite impossible!'

He was surprised into speaking very abruptly.

'Would it? I did not know. But I wish you would,' Italia murmured, looking down at her hands. She added hurriedly, and hardly moving her lips: 'If any one were watching your movements; if they suspected you of anything; it would be safer to have the child.'

'But, dear, I could not take her. It is impossible. Why, for one thing, I have no money. What could I do with the child in Rome?' Dino urged, still speaking with the vehemence of surprise.

She shrank away a little. 'I did not know. I think it could be managed.'

'Italia, Italia, I want to ask you about this work; you always know the right thing to advise one,' said Lucia in a hasty voice, looking up from her ironing.

But when Italia came to her she said nothing, only pushing back the girl's heavy hair, and giving her a little pat on the cheek. 'There, go away, go away, child. You are interrupting me. Go and talk to the *nonna*.'

The old woman was watching the fire, her eyes following its flickering motion like the eyes of a young child. She said in a quavering voice as Italia laid her hand on her shoulder, 'My knitting, Maria; have you brought me my knitting?'

'Grannie always calls Italia Maria,' observed the small Beppi in an explanatory manner to Dino. 'She says Maria do this,

Maria do that, and all the while she's speaking to Italia.'

'It was my mother's name,' said Lucia, nodding her head. 'She's dead these twenty years, the saints have her soul! but the *nonna* doesn't remember.'

Italia was kneeling before the purblind old dame, picking up the dropped stitches in a coarse woollen stocking. 'Now it will do nicely, dear *nonna*,' she said in her clear grave voice; and the grandmother laid her trembling hand upon the girl's thick hair and stroked it; 'You were always a good child, Maria; always. Now Lucia there she never married, an' there's many a thing she doesn't understand,—many a thing,—many a thing.'

'Italia, will you fetch me the body of this dress? I left it in the other room

on the table,' said Lucia suddenly. She waited till the girl had passed through the open door, then she hurriedly turned and looked at Dino: 'Go—go and help her find it!'

He went straight up to the girl and caught both her hands in his.

'My dear, my love, if there was anything I could do or say to comfort you. I would give my life—my life! to undo the harm that I have done to you, Italia.'

'Oh no,' she said hastily, and disengaged her hands and bent her head over Lucia's work. 'Dino.'

'Yes, dear.

'I wanted to ask you. There is just one thing.' She bent her face until it nearly touched the table. 'They tell me so, and I cannot contradict it,' she mur-

mured; her sweet lips contracted and grew pale.

'What is it, dear? Tell me. Tell me, Italia.'

'Ah, there is no other woman whom you care for, then, at Rome?' Her voice was scarcely audible, and she turned her head from side to side without looking at him.

'Italia!'

He caught hold of her hands again, and forced her to meet his glance. 'Upon my honour—no! There is no other woman for me in all the world but you. And I love you, Italia,—I love you, I love you,' Dino said.

She bent her head a little. 'I did not know.' Then, still without looking at him, 'Now—I shall not be so unhappy, my Dino.'

Sora Lucia came as far as the doorway and looked in. 'You have found the bodice, Italia? Well, well, there is no hurry for it, none at all.'

'I'm coming, Lucia—directly.'

She clasped both her hands together, and held them out mutely.

'Italia,' he said, seizing them, 'I must ask you this. Is it true about Maso? would your father make you marry him? For God's sake tell me!'

'I can't grieve my father,' she said faintly; 'he has only me. But—Dino'—her eyes seemed to pierce his very heart as she looked at him—'oh, my poor Dino!' she said. And she stooped and gathered up the scattered pieces of work from the table, and left him standing there alone in the room.

He could never remember what happened after then until he found himself out in the street, walking towards home through the still spring twilight.

But the next day, just as the Roman train was starting, a woman dressed very neatly in black, and holding a child by the hand, came running along the platform, looking in at the windows of the third-class carriages. It was Sora Lucia with little Palmira; they had scarcely time to secure their seats in Dino's compartment before the train started.

'You may well be surprised to see us; you may well look astonished, Sor Dino,' the little dressmaker began nervously, as the engine puffed out of the station.

'But, oh, Dino, Dino, it was Italia's plan!' broke in little Palmira, clapping

her hands ecstatically. 'And she asked mother to let me go with Lucia, only mother wouldn't tell you because it was to be a secret. And Italia said that Lucia would have to go and see her cousin, and you would take me to look at the wolf, Dino. Dino, will you take me to look at the wolf?'

'What does this mean?' the young man demanded rather impatiently, fixing his eyes on Lucia, who only tossed her head, affecting to be absorbed in examining the fastening of the window.

'And, Dino, Italia sold her ring in a shop, her beautiful new gold ring that the Signor Marchese gave her on her birthday. She sold it to get the money to send us, because Lucia had to go and see her cousins, who have a shop in the

Borgo,' continued little Palmira in an awe-struck voice. She had never seen Dino look so strangely; his face was quite white, and he did not seem at all pleased to see them. The prospect of feeding the wolf grew fainter at every minute, and Palmira's small pale cheeks began to flush ominously.

'There, there, little one. Don't cry. There's a good little girl,' said Dino hastily, and patting her kindly on the head.

He lowered his voice and turned to Lucia. 'Was this Italia's own idea? Did no one suggest it to her?' he asked anxiously.

'Nay, if you want to know so many things about Italia, Sor Dino, 'tis a pity you could not stay in Leghorn long

enough to ask her the questions yourself. But you prefer leaving the people who care for you to dry their own eyes and look after their own concerns. Well, well, it's the way of the world apparently. And you take your own responsibility. After all, one's actions belong to oneself; you can't have other people's babies,' said Sora Lucia dryly. And she continued to look out of the carriage window till they were well on their way to Rome.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRING OF THE SHOT.

VALDEZ seemed very much struck by the news of little Palmira's arrival. The child had gone to spend the night with Lucia at the house of her cousin. 'But you can call for her there in the morning, my Dino. Ay; call for her and take her with you by all means. So Italia sent her after you? Ah! it needs a woman to think of a thing like that. Ay; take the child; 'tis the one surest way of diverting any suspicion. And I'll be near you, lad, at the time; I'll look after her; I'll look after her.'

The old man had placed both food and

wine upon the table in the small lodging which he had secured for himself and De Rossi, but Dino did not even make a pretence of eating.

'You'll be fit for nothing to-morrow, lad,' Valdez remonstrated, looking at him rather anxiously.

'I want nothing—nothing,' said Dino with passionate impatience, turning his back upon him and beginning to pace up and down the narrow room.

'Nay, have your own way, lad; have your own way.'

Dino went and stood by the window, looking out at the small, dimly-lighted street. A slight shower of rain was falling; he stood there for a long time idly watching the reflections of the gas-lamp opposite upon the glistening stones.

'Valdez,' he said abruptly, 'where do you suppose I shall be at this time to-morrow?' But he went on without giving him time to answer. 'It's an odd thing —that feeling that one has done with one's youth. I've had an experience that has made everything different to me. I could not go back now; no more than a man could go back to being a child. Perhaps I wasn't worth much before. I never thought of that. But I think I might be of some use if I were to live now, Valdez.'

'Ay, my lad. You've made a great difference to me as it is,' the old man answered tenderly.

Presently he, too, rose from his chair and went and stood beside the window.

'There was one thing I had to tell

you; I nearly forgot it. I've been to see the head men of the committee since I came up here, and I've settled one thing for you,—after to-morrow your name gets struck off the books. I've done one or two things for them in my time,' Valdez said slowly, 'and they owed me something. I never asked them for anything before. And I made myself responsible for you in this matter, lad; I answered for you at Leghorn.' He laid his hand on Dino's shoulder. 'It was I who brought you into this thing at the beginning. And I made a mistake. You're not fit for it. But you've never reproached me with what it costs you, my lad; never once.'

Dino looked at him vaguely, as if he scarcely understood what was said.

'I'm not afraid, if that is what you mean,' he said simply. 'I never *was* afraid for myself. It is only leaving the others that I mind—Italia, and the mother, and old Drea. You don't know how good they have been to me, Valdez. I don't know why. It seems now as if I had never done anything for it. But I'm not frightened. You need not think I'd play you false at the last.'

'No, lad; no.'

'I offered once to give it all up—to throw everything over—for Italia. She would not let me. But you don't know how I hurt her, Valdez. And I can never make it up to her now.'

'Ah! she has a brave heart, that girl,' said Valdez in his deepest voice. 'A brave true heart. And courage and pas-

sion, Dino, you can't go beyond that,—courage and passion, they're the immortal facts of life. Where *they* pass the world marks the spot.'

He shifted his grasp a little, and let his hand rest upon the young man's arm, 'Come to bed, boy. Give over thinking. You are tired out, my Dino; you need sleep,' he said, speaking with a strange new gentleness. As for himself, he never went to bed at all. Through the long dreary hours of the night he sat patiently waiting in the darkened room for the sun to rise upon a new day.

Dino had thrown himself down upon the hard couch at the end of the room. He slept heavily, the sleep of young exhaustion. Once, towards daybreak, he started up suddenly with an exclamation of alarm.

'Valdez! I thought it was morning, Valdez.'

'Nay, lad; I'll call you when the time comes; go to sleep.'

'What sort of a night is it now?'

The old democrat rose stiffly from his chair; he felt cramped and sore from the long night's watching. He pushed aside the scanty curtain. 'The rain has stopped. It'll be a fine day to-morrow.'

'So much the better,' Dino said. 'I should like the sun to shine.' His head dropped again upon his hard pillow. The candle had burnt itself out in its socket. There was no sound in the room but the heavy breathing of the weary sleeper and the ticking of Valdez's watch, which lay before him on the table. He sat there, counting the hours.

And at last the dawn broke, chill and gray; the dim light struggling in at the window made a faint glimmer upon the glasses which stood beside the untouched food. To the old man keeping his faithful watch beside the sleeper, this was perhaps the hardest hour of all—till the darkness wore slowly away; the sky turned to a clear stainless blue; and all the city awoke to the radiance of the April day.

Soon the bells began their joyous clash and clamour. It was hardly eight o'clock when the two men stepped out into the street together, but the rejoicing populace was astir already, and hurrying towards the new quarter of the Macao.

Rome was in festa, heavy and splendid Rome. Bright flags fluttered, and many-coloured carpets and rugs were suspended

from every available window. All along the Via Nazionale, a double row of gaudily-decked Venetian masts, hung with long wreaths and brilliant flapping banners, marked the course where the royal carriages were to pass. But it was farther on, at the Piazza dell' Indipendenza, that the crowd was already thickest. The cordon of soldiers had been stationed here since early morning. Looking down from any of the neighbouring balconies upon that swarming sea of holiday-makers, it seemed impossible that even the great Piazza could contain more; and yet at every instant the place grew fuller and fuller; a steady stream of people poured in from every side street; peasants from the country in gay festa dress; shepherds from the Campagna in cloaks of matted

sheepskin; and strapping black-haired girls with shrill voices and the step of queens, who had come all the way from Trastevere to look on at the spectacle,—there was no end, no cessation to the thickening and the growing excitement of the crowd.

Dino had taken his place very early. It was exactly at the corner of the Piazza, where a street-lamp made a support for his back, and prevented him from being brushed aside by the gathering force and pressure of the multitude. He had found a safe place for Palmira to stand, on the iron ledge which ran around the lamp-post. The child's little pale face rose high above the crowd; she was quiet from very excess of excitement, only from time to time she stooped to touch her brother's shoulder in token of mute content.

Valdez stood only a few paces behind them. He had kept the revolver in his own possession to the last moment. It was arranged that he should pass it to Dino at a preconcerted signal, and as the King came riding past for the second time.

Dino had scarcely spoken all that morning, but otherwise there was no sign of unusual excitement about him. He was deadly pale; at short intervals a faint red flush came and went like a stain upon his colourless cheek. But he answered all little Palmira's questions very patiently. The morning seemed very long to him, that was all. He stood fingering the handkerchief in his pocket with which he was to give Valdez the signal for passing him the weapon.

It was more than twenty-four hours now since he had tasted food, and the long abstinence was beginning to tell upon him; at times his head felt dizzy, and if he closed his eyes the continuous roar and chatter of the crowd sunk—died away far off—like the sound of the surf upon a distant shore. At one moment he let himself go entirely to this curious new sensation of drifting far away; it was barely an instant of actual time, but he recovered himself with a start which ran like ice from head to foot; it was a horrible sensation, like a slow return from the very nothingness of death. He shivered and opened his eyes wide and looked about him. He seemed to have been far far away from it all in that one briefest pause of semi-unconsciousness, yet his eyes opened on the same radiant bright-

ness of the sunshine; a holiday sun shining bravely down on glancing arms and fretting horses; on the dark line of the soldiers pressing back the people, and the many-coloured dresses, the laughing, talking, good-natured faces of the gesticulating crowd.

One of these mounted troopers was just in front of Dino. As the human mass surged forward, urged by some unexplainable impulse of excitement and curiosity, this man's horse began backing and plunging. The young soldier turned around in his saddle, and his quick glance fell upon Palmira's startled face.

'Take care of your little girl there, my friend,' he said to Dino good-humouredly, and forced his horse away from the edge of the pavement.

Dino looked at him without answering. He wondered vaguely if this soldier boy with the friendly blue eyes and the rosy face would be one of the first to fall upon him when he was arrested? And then his thoughts escaped him again — the dimness came over his eyes.

He roused himself with a desperate effort. He began to count the number of windows in the house opposite; then the number of policemen stationed at the street corner; an officer went galloping by; he fixed his eyes upon the glancing uniform until it became a mere spot of brightness in the distance.

Hark!

The gun at the palace. The King was starting from the Quirinal. All the scattered cries and laughs and voices

were wielded together into one long quavering roar of satisfaction and excitement.

There—again! and nearer at hand this second gun.

The cheers rise higher, sink deeper. He is coming, the young soldier King, the master of Italy, the popular hero. See! hats are waving, men are shouting,—the infection of enthusiasm catches and runs like fire along the line of eager, expectant faces. Here he comes. The roar lifts, swells, grows louder and louder; the military bands on either side of the piazza break with one accord into the triumphant ringing rhythm of the royal march. They have seen the troops defile before them with scarcely a sign of interest, but now, at sight of that little isolated group

of riders with the plumed and glittering helmets, there comes one mad instant of frantic acclamation, when every man in that crowd feels that he too has some part and possession in all the compelling, alluring splendour and success of life.

And just behind the royal cavalier, among the glittering group of aides-de-camp, rode the young Marchese Balbi. He was so near that Dino could scarcely believe their eyes did not actually meet; but if Gasparo recognised him he gave no sign, riding on with a smile upon his happy face, his silver-mounted accoutrements shining bravely in the sun.

And so, for the first time, the doomed King passed by.

Dino scarcely heeded him; at that moment he had forgotten everything

unconnected with the sight of that one familiar face. His mother, his old home, —Italia even,—had grown dim and unreal; he forgot them all in the sensation of that quick rush of renewed affection. All the old pride, the old delight, in Gasparo, which had made so great a part of his boyhood, came back upon him with the irresistible claims of reawakened tenderness. He was there to commit a murder; and out of all that crowd he saw only the one face which he knew — and he loved it.

That curious sense of floating away, far away from everything living, fell upon him again. He lost all count of time. He could never tell how long it was before he heard little Palmira cry out in shrill tones of childish excitement:

'I see him, Dino. There he comes again. The King, the King all in gold!'

Dino started, it seemed to him as if he started wide awake. He drew himself up like a soldier standing at attention; his brain was steady; his senses all alert. He watched eagerly, the white plumes were slowly advancing between the two serried ranks of the soldiery. He waited until he could distinguish the King's face distinctly; he saw him lean a little forward and pat his restive horse——.

And then, without turning, he gave Valdez the preconcerted signal.

And even as he raised the handkerchief to his lips he heard, not ten paces off, the sharp ringing report of a shot.

It was all over in an instant—the sound —the plunging of the frightened horses.

He saw the white plume of the King pass by unscathed, and Gasparo Balbi, who was riding nearest him, throw up his arms and fall backward, quietly, into the rising cloud of dust.

A great cry broke from the people all about him—it rang in his ears—it sounded far away like the beating of a furious tide upon the distant, distant shore. A blackness, a horrible blackness which he could feel, passed over his face like a cloud. And then he knew nothing more.

. . . . .

Some quarter of an hour later one of the two *guardie* who were helping to lift his insensible body into a street cab looked compassionately down at Dino's clenched hands and pallid death-like face.

"'Tis no wonder the poor *giovane*

fainted,' he said sympathetically, addressing the little crowd about him. ''Tis no wonder he fainted. *Perdio!* as it so happens I was looking straight at him,—he was not ten paces away from the villain who fired the shot.'

CHAPTER XII.

VESTIGIA NULLA RETRORSUM.

One cloudless April morning, some three weeks later, the warm bright sunshine was making a pleasant difference even to the prisoners who were taking their usual hour of exercise between the four high walls of the paved courtyard at the Carcere Nuove. But there was one among them, a middle-aged man with gray hair and a curiously piercing look in his heavy-lidded eyes, who seemed to be expecting something beside the blue sky and the soft air of this balmy morning. And presently that something came.

The other prisoners looked after him rather enviously as he left the court in answer to the turnkey's imperative summons. Apparently he had been sent for to speak to a friend; they grumbled a little between themselves at this sign of the governor's favour.

It was Dino de Rossi who was waiting for Valdez in that small high-walled cell. The two men had not met since the morning of the attempted assassination; they grasped hands and looked into one another's face with an emotion which lay too deep for mere speech.

Presently the older man s mouth relaxed into a faint smile. 'Well, lad. So you have come to see me. You are looking better. They told me you were very ill, and I've been anxious about you,' he said simply.

'I came to you as soon as I could get up,' Dino answered, in a voice that was broken with repressed feeling. He looked about him, at the prison bed, the grated window, the bare stone walls. 'You've put yourself here,—here, in my place, Valdez. Valdez, it nearly drives me mad to remember it. I'd give half my life if I could change places with you to-day.'

'Nay, my lad, there's nothing the matter with the place. It's comfortable enough; and it's of my own choosing. Come, come, my Dino; you're weak still with the fever; sit down, lad, sit down.'

They sat down side by side on the narrow straw pallet. Then Valdez added cheerfully, 'And there's better news still of your friend Gasparo this morning. I'm glad of that. I bore the young man no

malice; I'm glad to think he's likely to get over it, after all.'

'Valdez, I never could understand that part of it; they said at the trial you wanted to shoot him purposely. They said you had had some quarrel with him?'

'Ay, lad. There was no denying we had had words together; and that fat old fool, Sor Giovanni, whom they got up from Leghorn as a witness,—he was willing to swear till he was black in the face that he had heard me threaten to murder the young Marchese.' He lowered his voice and added, 'I'd had my directions beforehand—from them—up at the committee there, what to say in case the attempt on the King proved a failure. I know the best thing I can do for them is to hold my tongue. If the judges chose to shut their

eyes to what's staring them in the face, it's not my duty to correct their blunders. But they wanted to hush it up, lad; they did not want to make it into a political scandal, with those elections coming on.'

He was silent again. Then he turned and laid his hand affectionately, in the old way, on Dino's shoulder.

'How are they all at Leghorn, boy?"

'All well. I had a letter from my mother this morning.'

'And Italia?'

Dino half smiled. 'Well too. She sent me a message for you. She wanted you to know she never would believe you had meant to hurt anybody. You don't mind my telling you, Valdez? She meant only what was kindest.'

'Ay. She's a good girl that; a good

girl. And when are you going back to them all, my boy,' he asked suddenly, fixing his companion with his piercing glance.

Dino flushed red. 'I shall stay and see you through it. Valdez, that is little enough to do for you. You don't think I would leave you till I see you free?'

'Nay, lad,' said the old man very gently, 'you'll let me have my own way i' this matter, I know. I've seen you; and you know I'm pretty safe as it is. Unless things take a bad turn for that young Gasparo, they can't do much worse to me than shut me up in prison for a bit. And that's nothing.'

He started up to his feet, and began pacing backwards and forwards between the four walls of the narrow cell.

'The plan's miscarried. It may have been a good one or a bad one, but we

know where the orders came from, and it wasn't our place to judge of that. And I don't judge of it. I've chosen my place in life, and I'll abide by it to the end. When a man has meant anything strongly there's never any real going back again for him. It isn't the failure or the success, it's the purpose, the will that is in him, that makes the difference.'

He stopped, leaning against the wall beneath the grated window.

'What is the whole teaching of daily life, my Dino, if it is not to accept the material success—*le fait accompli*—as if it were a very law from heaven? Not to do that, they tell us, is to be a fool or a madman; it is to shut one's eyes against evidence, and one's ears against common-sense; to wear out friendship and to for-

feit sympathy. That's the lesson you may learn at any street corner, and, if you listen, you will hear it cried out in the wilderness. It's what your old fisher friend, how do you call him? old Andrea, has preached to you. 'Tis the Alpha and Omega of many a good man's philosophy. But I,' the old socialist drew himself up, and his eyes flashed fire, 'I think otherwise. To me, half the time, material success, and what society teaches, and what poverty enjoins, are but the negation of every high ideal, of every disinterested protest against injustice, of every struggle against social tyranny and bitter social wrong. That's my creed, lad. That's my creed, and, good or bad, I'll never turn my back upon it. No! not if I had to spend every hour of my existence here!'

'I wish to God that I could do more than merely understand you, I wish to God that I were capable of feeling with you, believing with you, Valdez.'

'Nay, lad, you've tried; you've done your best. And when you found you'd undertaken more than you could well accomplish, still you went on,—you went on. To be faithful, my Dino, to keep faith simply and joyously, is to reach and hold the essential best of life. But to keep faith at any price, in any fashion, to do it even grudgingly, counting the cost, looking back at the world with all its temptations, yet, even then, moving away from them, however slowly—well, even that is enough to give some touch of divine dignity to a life. It is reaching the end without the glow of the triumph, but

still the end *is* reached. We can't all of us claim the praise as well as the victory, and yet the victory is there.'

He spoke with all the force and fervour of a life-long conviction. The faint light streaming in at the small high window gave a solemn look of isolation to the narrow room; it seemed a fitting background for the worn undaunted face.

But presently the old man's glance softened. He held out both his hands.

'You're young, lad, you're young, and all the best of life's before you. It makes me glad to think of that still. For you've made a great difference in *my* life, Dino. And it hurt me, ay, it hurt me to think that I had injured yours.'

'Valdez—if I'm ever worth anything—if I ever learn to believe unreservedly in

anything—— Oh, I can't say it. But you know what I mean ;—I owe it all to you.'

They grasped one another's hands hard as the key turned harshly in the lock of the door behind them. They spoke no word of farewell.

Palmira was waiting for Dino in the jailor's lodge by the entrance. The child gave one quick anxious look into her brother's quivering face, then she slipped her hand quietly into his without speaking. Both were silent until they stood outside the iron gates. Then Dino stood still. He was weak yet, and confused from the fever. He could scarcely understand how much of what was passing around him was real. He stood there hesitating ; surely it was no delusion that he had pledged his very life away ? Yet he stood there, a

free man, in the April sunlight; with the hand of a little child in his, and behind him was the prison door.

He crossed over to the small piazza; he went and sat on a wooden bench beside the fountain; it wanted an hour yet to the time of the starting of the Leghorn train.

'Are we not going back now, my Dino, to Italia?' Palmira asked, after a long pause, eyeing him anxiously.

'Ay.'

He answered like a man in a dream. And it was a dream of coming joy which held him silent; a vision of flood-tides filling all the empty places of existence; a happy vision of love, strong to conceal and strong to forget;—of Italia, waiting by the sea.

THE END.

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